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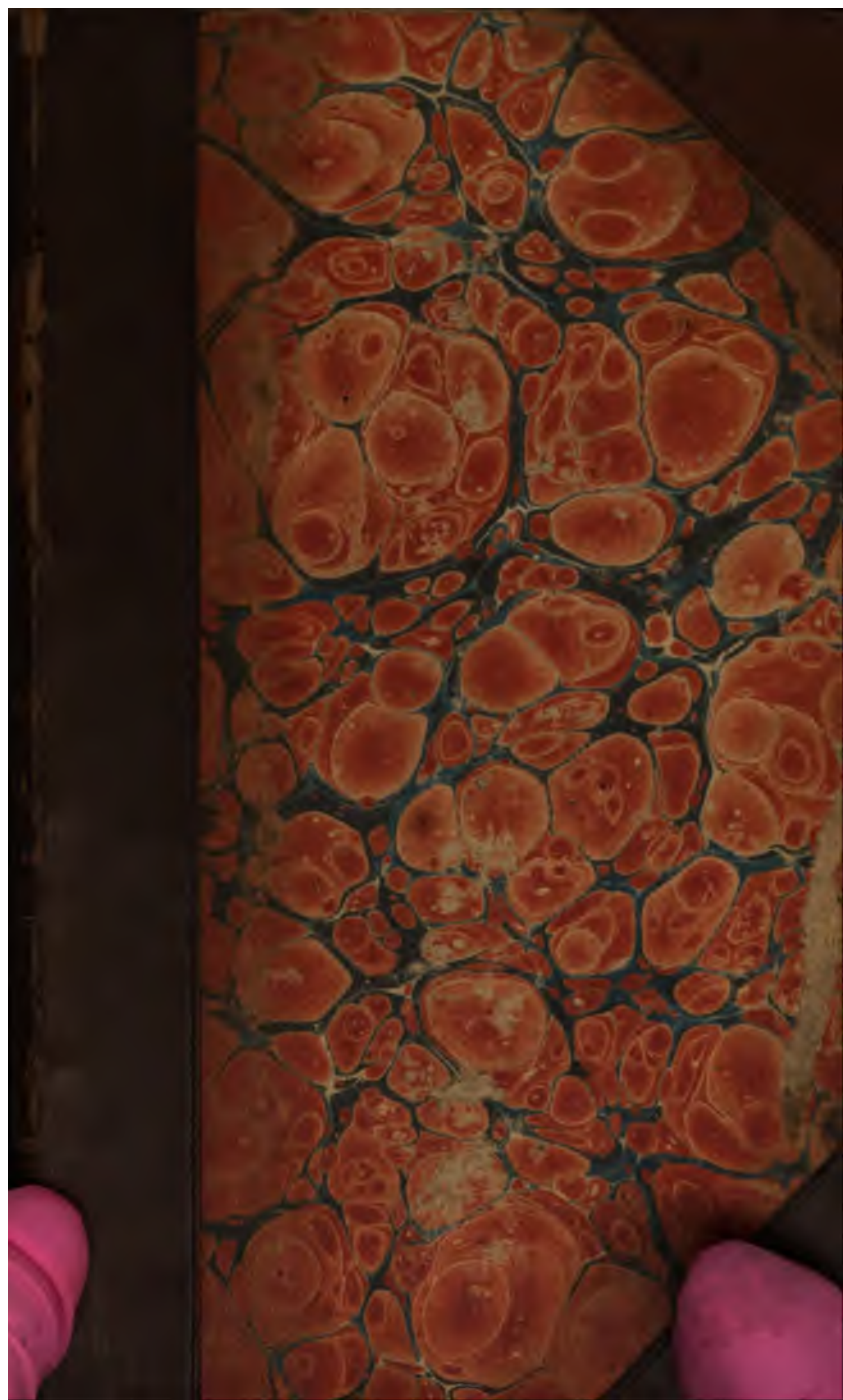
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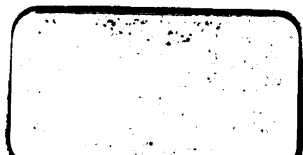
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TREATISE ON CONFIRMATION :

WITH

PASTORAL DISCOURSES

APPLICABLE TO

CONFIRMED PERSONS.

BY

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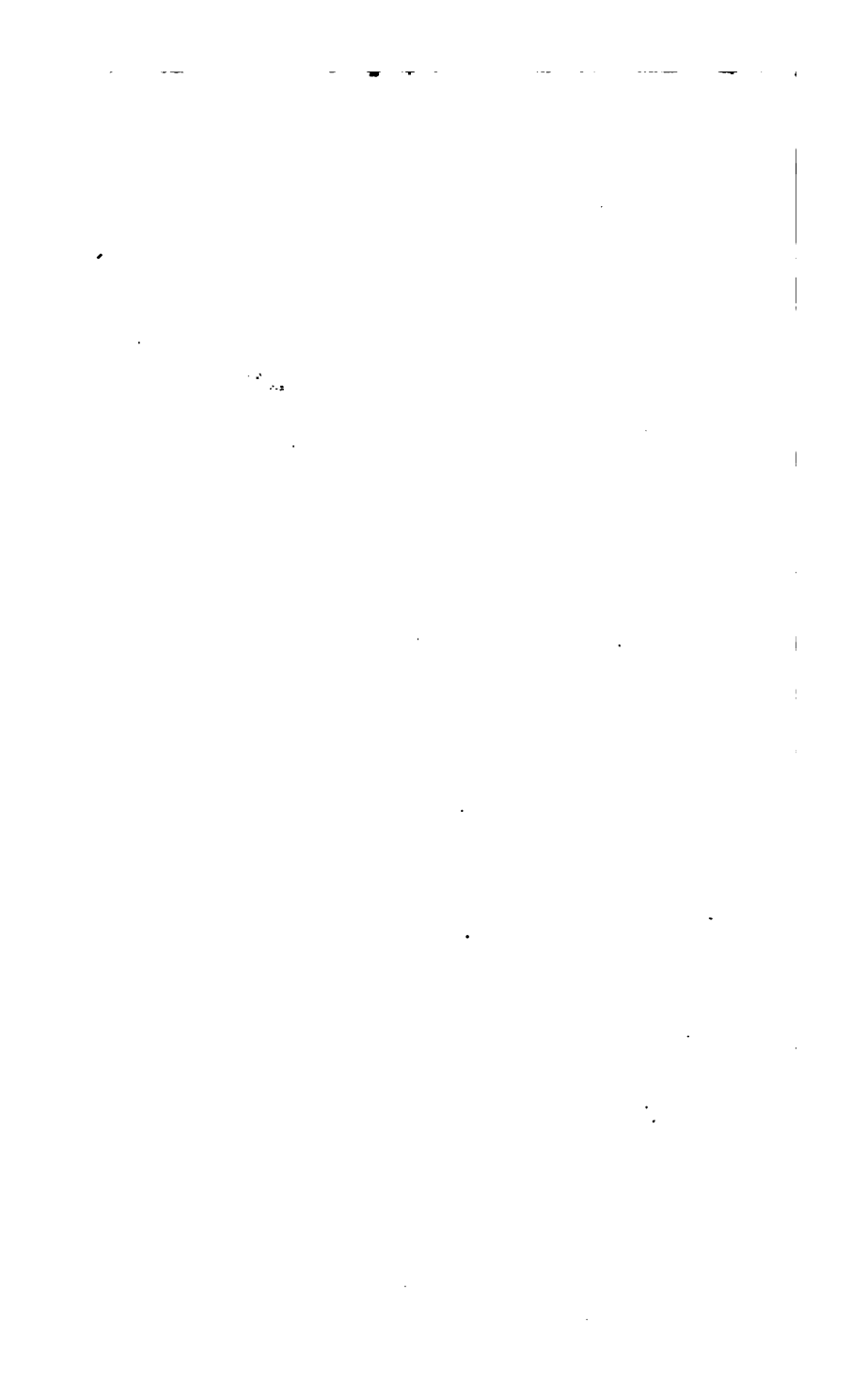
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LONDON :
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TO THE
HON. HARRIET HELY HUTCHINSON,
OF
WESTON HOUSE
IN THE COUNTY OF NORTHAMPTON,

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED
UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF VERY GREAT ESTEEM,
AND OF
A DEEP SENSE, OF THE VALUE OF HER FRIENDSHIP AND
OF OBLIGATION FOR HER KINDNESS.



P R E F A C E.



THE subject of Confirmation cannot be justly viewed without the aid of correct notions respecting other important points of Christian doctrine. These latter appear to me to be, in too many instances, obscured by the prevalence of indeterminate and erroneous opinions; and (as one error must, in the process of reasoning, generate another) I also think that there has arisen, from this circumstance, a loose and latitudinarian fashion of speaking respecting Confirmation.

It was at one time my intention to connect with the present treatise, a full vindication of the true principles of the Church respecting the points to which I thus allude.

But I have abandoned this intention for the following reasons. The work itself having a chief regard to the excitement and furtherance of practical piety in young persons, I thought that the introduction, further than was necessary, of any polemical disquisition, would involve an incongruity with its purpose, and probably be attended with a prejudice to any humble measure of good effect which it may possibly have. It also appeared to me, that I had a right, in a work of this nature, to presume upon the acknowledged and essential principles of the communion to which I belong, and to the members of which I address myself.

Lest, however, the general argument, as it now stands, should be thought unsustained by an adequate basis, I will venture to advert to two topics, which have unavoidably been introduced into it, but which could not, without great inconvenience, have been fully discussed in the body of the work. This I do in the hope that the present brief

remarks may remedy the absence of more extended consideration. If there be not time for a long citation of authorities,—a critical examination of texts,—an anticipation of some objections,—a notice of others, and a sifting of all; it will still be of use to shew, with respect to any important positions which have been advanced, that they have not been assumed merely because they suited the partiality, or pleased the fancy, of a writer. For the cause of religion is rather hurt than promoted, by any efforts to awaken piety or enliven the devotional character on principles, which disclaim the alliance of sound reason and of rigid truth. And possibly, after all, the briefer representation may be the more desirable: for the longest argumentative discourses have seldom been so successful as to satisfy all men; and simplicity of statement is, with the bulk of mankind, more adapted to conviction, than prolixity and complication are.

I. We learn from the Acts of the Apostles *, that the gift of the Holy Spirit was conferred on the early Christians as a consequence of the Apostles' laying their hands upon them. But we are told that this gift related exclusively to the *extraordinary* operations of the Holy Spirit: that the usage of the apostles does not therefore apply to a state of the Church, in which we seek and expect only his *ordinary* graces. Now, common as this remark is, it will appear that, in the following treatise, though I have considered it as an error, I have not offered a single argument for its confutation.

To those, then, who thus object, I feel myself entitled to answer as follows: They who advance the objection are bound to *prove* it; I am not, by any legitimate principle of argumentation, bound to prove the contrary. This is the general duty of all

* Chapters viii. and xix.

persons who introduce *new* opinions; and I feel that I have a perfect right to consider this *as* a new opinion. I can find no vestige of it in the ancient Church. The apostolical imposition of hands prevailed, indeed, in an age, when those gifts of the Holy Spirit, which we distinguish by the term *extraordinary*, were common in the Church. But when they became less common, or when they were supposed to have wholly ceased; did the apostolic usage of confirmation cease also? At a time, or under circumstances, when such gifts were not looked for; does any notion appear to have existed, that the ordinance had therefore become inapplicable? The whole sense of antiquity, so far as I have been able by careful enquiry to make myself acquainted with it, is fully and decidedly contradictory to this notion. Shall we then imagine, that this ordinance had an exclusive relation to the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, and yet that such gifts should have been withdrawn without

any previous instruction or guidance having been afforded to the Church, relating to the discontinuance of an ordinance which would henceforth become unsuitable to its condition and circumstances? Let the maintainers of this opinion produce from Scripture any intimation, that the apostolical ordinance was only temporary and occasional: let them produce any scriptural intimation, that the reason and design of it were understood in apostolical times conformably to their own views: let them point to the time, when, in consequence of miraculous powers being no longer expected, the ordinance was discontinued. This, at least, is necessary for the proof of their point: but this, I do not hesitate to say, they *cannot* do. Yet till it is done, it is too much to expect of Christians to believe, that an ordinance such as this should have begun with the practice of the apostles and the beginning of the Church, and continued for many centuries with its progress,

unaccompanied by any provision for a right comprehension of its design. .’

I am aware, that every reference to primitive antiquity is frequently treated with great contempt, and not unlikely to be encountered with an accusation, of exalting the ancient fathers to the same authority with the canonical Scripture. But surely there is no necessity for thus confusing evidence with authority*. When a doubt exists respecting the sense of Scripture, it is surely advisable to use any resources of

* How necessary it is to *distinguish* one from the other may be judged from an egregious absurdity into which a great man has been led by neglecting to do so. Dr. Mosheim, in his Ecclesiastical History, [Cent. 16. Sect. 3. Part 2. Chap. ii. 28.] has a statement to this effect: “To the authority of the Books of the Old and New Testament the Church of England adds that of the writings of the Fathers during the first five centuries.” He might have said with equal propriety: “To the authority of the canonical Scriptures the Church of England adds that of Buxtorf’s Hebrew Lexicon; for the translators of the Bible made great use of that work in their endeavours to ascertain the true sense of the original.” Such is the pure and genuine effect of *confusion of ideas*; for the great learning and candour of this writer will admit no other mode of accounting for such a remarkable passage.

human exposition which lie within our reach. And why, in the use of such resources, should less importance be attached to the practice of men contemporary, or nearly contemporary, with the Apostles, than to the dogmas of a Lutheran or Calvinistic doctor? though the latter may not impossibly be alleged with great veneration by those, who shew little deference to the writings of primitive saints and apostolical men.

But I repeat, that they who maintain this objection, are bound to display the arguments on their side of the question. They insist on a distinction: let them point out the time when this distinction was first understood in the Church. If this time be later than the completion of the writings of the New Testament: then they *must* prove their point, if they prove it at all, from the ancient fathers and historians of the Church. If they will admit no reference except to the canonical Scripture, then, I

would still ask them, Why is the apostolical confirmation thought inapplicable to the present state of the Church? Is it because it is supposed to have related only to the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit? But surely the Scripture has no where *said* so. I grant, that in one instance, we are expressly told, that these gifts became manifest*; and I will grant, also, that in another instance it seems to be obviously *implied* that they did†. But what then? Are not the ordinary graces of Christian piety explicitly ascribed by the Word of God, to the operation of the same Divine Being? But these latter, it may be said, are not, like the others, *alleged* in connexion with the apostolical imposition of hands. I ask, then, how can it be reasonably expected that they *should* be alleged in a case, where the things required were, a miraculous and a

* Acts xix. 6.

† Acts viii. 18. "When Simon *saw* that through laying on of the Apostles' hands," &c.

visible attestation of a new religion, and the *visible* signs of an apostle's authority? I am ready to grant that the ordinary graces were as much supernatural as the extraordinary; but all men must allow, that the former were not suited like the latter, in each case in which they were bestowed, to the purpose of *evidence*. *In each case*, I say; because the collective influence of them, as they discovered themselves in the moral conduct of the early believers, was powerfully operative towards the conversion of the heathens and the enlargement of the Church.

If this will not satisfy the maintainers of this objection, it is for them to produce from Scripture any proof, that the apostolical usage was intended to cease together with the cessation of those gifts of sensible miracle, to which they suppose it to have had an exclusive relation. This they certainly cannot do; and yet I think it will not be very difficult to produce a

strong scriptural intimation to the contrary. For there is a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews* which is frequently alleged to this effect : and I cannot help thinking that, when it is viewed in connexion with the foregoing considerations, it carries with it an irresistible force of application to the subject.

I repeat, then, with respect to this notion of Confirmation, that it can be justly viewed only as a doctrinal novelty, introduced in opposition to that persuasion of the Catholic Church, which had previously been settled and uniform, as well as grounded on the true sense of Scripture.

Before I quit this subject, I am anxious to submit to the reader one further remark. In the choice of human methods for the exposition of Scripture, it appears to me, that there are few things more conducive to a just estimate of theological dogmas,

* Chap. vi. ver. 1, 2.

than a study of Ecclesiastical history, and of the writers belonging to the ancient times of the Church. I do not say, that this is necessary for the conviction or the edification of private Christians : but I will maintain that, for the benefit of those who are intrusted with the guidance and instruction of such Christians, it throws a mighty power of illustration on the great subject which they are bound to teach and to explain. To explain my meaning by examples, I will refer to the doctrines of Papal Supremacy and Transubstantiation. Suppose it shall appear that, in the midst of voluminous records and writings, the former of these doctrines was not received during the first six centuries of the Church ; nor of the second during the first twelve : that, during several hundred years from the commencement of Christianity, many millions who had lived and died in the profession of the faith, and great multitudes who had adorned its doctrine by the sanctity of their lives,

and suffered martyrdom in attestation of its truth, appear from the strongest moral evidence to have been totally unacquainted with either of these doctrines: if, I say, a case of this kind can be made out; then there must appear to every candid mind a strong ground of suspicion, *that the scriptural texts alleged in support of these doctrines must have been greatly misunderstood.* Let us apply this to the doctrine which invalidates the necessity for Confirmation, by representing its primitive observance to have related only to the peculiar circumstances of the apostolical times. At what precise date this notion first arose, I have not had time to ascertain; but I strongly suspect, that Transubstantiation with all its absurdity, has a much longer prescription of time in its favour. Hooker, in his Ecclesiastical Polity, has some expressions by which I am led to think that it was never much heard of before the sixteenth century, and that it then originated with

that class of reformers, who were zealous to abrogate every thing peculiar to the episcopal, as distinguished from the presbyterial, office. On this point I speak with diffidence : I am, however, quite satisfied, that the notion is not to be found in any extant writings of the primitive Church.

II. There is another point essentially connected with the true doctrine of Confirmation : I mean, the office and authority of Bishops. I doubt not, that by some Divines, if they should honour my work with their notice, my expressions will be thought to exalt too highly the power and dignity of that order of the evangelical ministry. To them it might suffice to answer : I write to members of my own Church, and I have advanced no representations inconsistent with her doctrines. But I am induced by the following consideration to go somewhat farther. There are those who, though they attach them-

selves to an episcopal communion, entertain on this subject, sentiments, which appear to me greatly to deviate from Scriptural truth : while I cannot doubt that their views are erroneous, so neither can I disguise to myself the fact, that those views are current with considerable numbers : nor can I view the error as one of trifling import, since it appears to me irreconcilable with the principles essentially belonging to the constitution of a Christian Church ; and the bond of connexion with a true Church must, I think, on the supposition of such views being entertained, be very loose and precarious.

By some, the episcopal ministry is regarded, not as indispensable to a true Church, but simply as a measure of ecclesiastical arrangement, sanctioned by its lawfulness, and recommended by its convenience, without any other foundation than custom and human authority. In accordance with these views we are sometimes told, that Bishops

and Presbyters compose one and the same order, differing from each other only in power and jurisdiction. With a view to obviate the dangerous and pernicious tendency which I think to be inherent in these opinions, I am desirous of stating briefly the true grounds of that authority which belongs to the office of a Bishop. Let me be excused if I speak of such tendency as *dangerous and pernicious*: it obviously must be so if the opinions are false. For if they be false, it must follow, that episcopacy can be the only form of a true Church: while such opinions will allow men, (at the suggestion of convenience, or of what *they may think* a legitimate ecclesiastical constitution,) conscientiously to attach themselves to a religious community in which episcopacy is not received.

Let us then regard the appointment by which our Lord designated his Apostles to the ministry of the gospel. And herein let three things be especially noted.

I. Their work. "Go YE, AND DISCIPLE

ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM, IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST; TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU *."

II. Their authority. "AS MY FATHER HATH SENT ME, EVEN SO SEND I YOU†." "HE THAT RECEIVETH WHOMSOEVER I SEND RECEIVETH ME; AND HE THAT RECEIVETH ME RECEIVETH HIM THAT SENT ME ‡."

III. The sanction of their authority. "HE THAT BELIEVETH AND IS BAPTIZED, SHALL BE SAVED; BUT HE THAT BELIEVETH NOT, SHALL BE DAMNED §."

With regard to their *work*, this was to disciple, to baptize, and to teach: it is plain that this was not to end with their natural lives. With regard to their *authority*, it is equally plain from the words of their commission, that *they* must have received the *power* of sending others, even as Christ had

* Matt. xxviii. 19.

† John xx. 21.

‡ John xiii. 20.

§ Mark xvi. 16.

sent them: and the *necessity* of sending others must continue, as long as it was necessary to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach; that is to say, it must continue till the end of the world. For till that time comes, this work must be carried on: nor can it ever be carried on by persons unauthorized.

We are therefore to enquire, in what class of persons, as successors to the apostles, the authority of the apostles is now to be found: I speak of that authority with regard to its plenary extent, and I speak of successors, as having been made such by legitimate appointment.

Now it is plain, that such authority is *not* to be found in either of the two classes which are denoted by the terms, *Presbyter* and *Deacon*. For proof of this, look back to the state of things at that period of the Reformation, when Christian communities were formed under a ministry of Presbyters, Bishops being excluded.

What power then had the Presbyters of those days to exercise, in the way of providing successors to their own office, the functions belonging to the plenary authority of a Bishop ? Their office, when compared with that of Bishops, was plainly a *restricted* one : this must be manifest from the terms and manner of their appointment to it. In the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments, their commission was authoritative, and their acts were valid : but it cannot be pretended that those Presbyters had, at their ordination, received the power of ordaining pastors such as themselves.

I do not here feel it necessary to concern myself with any disputations respecting the scriptural acceptance of the terms, Bishop and Presbyter. I use the term Bishop in the common sense now attached to it by those, who insist on the necessity of an episcopal ministry. Words may legitimately vary in their application ; but the

essential characters of an office divinely appointed must continue the same. The question is, where are we to find the successors to the full authority of the Apostles in the permanent government of the Church? In the Presbyters to whom I refer we cannot find them : because to the Apostles was given the power of ordaining both successors and deputies ; to those Presbyters it was *not* given. For it is plain that they had no such commission, which we can acknowledge as given to them, like that of Christ to his Apostles, *by express and outward designation*.

But if there be advanced, as distinct from such exterior designation, the plea of *an inward call to the ministry* ; if this, I say, be alleged in vindication of *any* principle which has at any time been adopted into the government of a religious community, then the following question arises : Unless such allegation be stamped with the seal and credentials of a manifest and miraculous

power, how can it be possible for the flock to distinguish the lawful shepherd? since the plea has in various ages been advanced by multitudes of persons in support of doctrines contradictory to each other, and even inconsistent with themselves.

But a detailed examination of these points, though I cannot but think that it would be highly suitable to the present condition and circumstances of the Christian Church, would not be equally so to the present occasion: on which I have noticed them only so far as might be necessary in order to remove a stumbling block from the reader in his progress through the following pages.

Very few words remain to be offered respecting the Discourses annexed to this treatise. They have been thus placed, not on account of any systematic connexion with the foregoing subject, but as having a possible tendency to aid the impressions

under which it is desirable that subject should be viewed. In case of their being partly thought to exceed the just measure of such addresses, it may be remarked, that I have felt myself at liberty, in the process of revision for the press, to extend them beyond the limits prescribed by the convenience of oral delivery. It was my intention to have added some others of similar character : but circumstances have rendered it inconvenient to me either to enlarge this publication, or to keep it any longer on my hands.

BANBURY VICARAGE,

Feb. 25, 1830.

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off for ever *." Such, indeed, has been the concurrent dictate of human experience: never was there a wise and loving father who neglected thus to counsel his offspring: the precept has been echoed from age to age, and spread abroad from clime to clime: its truth has been universally established by the happiness of the righteous and by the misery of the wicked; by those who have obeyed it to their joy, and by those who have transgressed it to their shame. Who ever lived by this rule, and repented that he had done so? Who ever spent his youth and manhood in the neglect of it, and rejoiced thereat when he came to die? David and Solomon in particular, both knew *from experience* the value of this precept: the joys and the sorrows of their lives bore equal witness to it; from both of them the advice comes to us, marked with the strong impress of parental love: both of them, when they uttered it, were drawing near to the grave, and in full prospect of that hour, the thought of which has a mighty influence, in disposing the mind to seriousness and truth and a right estimate of things.

When religion speaks to man, it is with autho-

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

riety. Such authority, if it be acknowledged, cannot be resisted without manifest folly. Nor does it matter, as to this point, how great is the multitude of those who do resist: neither folly nor danger is lessened by the number who partake in it. For this authority is backed with a tremendous sanction, and proposes a most awful choice: the peace of God in this life, and the everlasting bliss of his future presence, are set against remorse, and anguish, and everlasting despair. Remember, therefore, now, thy Creator. This, under such circumstances, can be, for *all* men, the only safe course: for this *must* be done before we die: delay may end in total loss of opportunity; and the issue of a failure must be dreadful beyond expression. But the precept carries with it a special force of application to the *young*. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Remember him at the beginning of your pilgrimage, in order that he may sustain and support you in the progress of it. Remember him, so as to secure his blessing and his presence all the days of your life. Remember him before your soul is deeply stained with uncleanness, and your spirit broken under the sense of guilt: for then, perhaps, you will be unable to remember him without distraction and despair. Remember him before the

power of evil has established a dominion over you: for then, mighty efforts and painful struggles, far beyond all the duties of an early piety, will be required for your conversion. Remember him now, while you may walk in the light of his favour and in the comfort of his love. Remember him now, before you have wandered into the dark and intricate ways of wicked men; into the way which goeth down to hell; the way in which many have perished, and from which few have returned. Remember him now, in an acceptable time, and in a season of mercy and of kindness; lest you be compelled hereafter to remember him in a season of judgment and of severity, and at a time when you shall find no place for repentance, though you seek it carefully with many tears.

Slight not these admonitions on the ground of their being common. The best guidance to happiness, and the best rules of duty, are those most commonly enjoyed: so great has been the bounty of God in the dispensation of his inestimable truth! It is the character of Divine Wisdom, as we find her poetically described in Holy Writ, that she crieth without, and uttereth her voice in the streets; that she crieth in the chief place of concourse, and in the openings of the gates, and uttereth her words

in the city*. This also is the wisdom, of which the neglect will be most calamitous. This wisdom, as long as man shall exist, it will be needful to inculcate and fatal to contempt. It applies to all men: but it particularly suits the circumstances and the customary age of those, who are called upon by the authority of the Church, at the appointed seasons of Confirmation. Let it thus be regarded by those to whom the consideration of this subject is proposed. Let it thus, I say, be regarded both by those who would offer themselves to this sacred ordinance, and by others connected with them by any natural or spiritual relation, as parents or as sponsors.

* Proverbs I.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHAT CONFIRMATION CONSISTS, AND HOW IT IS ADMINISTERED.

FOR the purpose of conveying a right understanding of this subject, I shall first explain the meaning of the word Confirmation, and describe the manner of administering the ordinance denoted by it.

By *Confirmation* is meant, the solemn laying on of the hands of the Bishop upon such, as have been baptized and have come to years of discretion. This is performed in the following manner: which I shall describe from the directions contained in the Book of Common Prayer.

It is required that children who have been baptized, shall, after they have learned to say, in their mother tongue, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and have been further instructed in the Church Catechism; be brought to the Bishop to be confirmed.

When the Bishop gives notice of his intention

to confirm, the Curate of every parish is to provide a list of all such persons in his parish as he thinks fit to be presented to the Bishop for that purpose. If the Bishop approve of the persons thus named, he confirms them according to this form.

They are brought to the Church, and thus questioned by the Bishop: "Do you here, in the presence of God, and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your baptism; ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe and to do all those things which your godfathers and godmothers* then undertook for you?" To this question every one is required to make answer, "I do." After this the Bishop, in order to their being enabled to fulfil this their vow, prays to God, that he would strengthen them with his Holy Spirit, and daily increase in

* It is to be regretted that no provision is here made for the case of persons who have been baptized in riper years, and who, at their baptism, answer *for themselves*. The inconvenience arising from the omission has practically occurred to my notice. I think it the more important to be remarked upon, because I consider as greatly mistaken, those who think that Confirmation does not apply to persons who have been thus baptized. By the rules of our Church, it is certainly required of them. The sequel of these remarks may tend to shew, that it is also required by higher authority.

them his manifold gifts of grace. He then, while they kneel before him, lays his hand upon them, and entreats God "to defend them with his heavenly grace, that they may continue his for ever, and daily increase in his Holy Spirit more and more, till they come to his everlasting kingdom." To this imposition of hands are added, after the whole number have been confirmed, suitable addresses and petitions to the Father of grace and mercy: and the solemnity ends with the benediction of the Bishop.

Relating to this ordinance, it is required by the Church, that none be admitted to the Holy Communion till they either have complied with it, or are ready and desirous so to do.

It is also required, that every one shall have a godfather or a godmother, as a witness of his confirmation: but this, with other parts of the duty of godfathers and godmothers, is too generally neglected.

Such then are the nature of Confirmation; the manner of its observance; and the requirements of the Church relating to it.

CHAPTER III.

AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH FOR THE PRACTICE OF CONFIRMATION.

IF we now consider the reasons for which the Church has prescribed this ordinance, we shall at the same time discover the grounds of duty and of benefit which enforce the observance of it.

Of these reasons the chief is *the practice of the Apostles* * : they laid their hands on such as had been baptized, and, as the consequence of their so doing, those persons received the Holy Ghost. But you are not, with regard to this point, to imagine that the Bishop has any power *to give the Holy Spirit* : this the Apostles themselves did not. *They* laid on their hands, and *God* gave his Holy Spirit, as a grace and blessing attendant on their sacred ministration. And the Church piously and humbly trusts that, in consequence of the fervent prayers of the congregation, those on whom the Bishop now lays his hands, will, if they duly pre-

* Acts viii. 17. xix. 6.

pare for the reception of that benefit, be blessed with the divine influences and sanctifying graces of the same Holy Spirit.

To justify this expectation we have, in the first instance, a *general* promise of God ; and such a promise as may be confidently applied to the present case. For we are directed to pray, not for ourselves only, but for each other also : for our encouragement to do so Christ has promised to grant, whatever by the joint suffrages of his Church is asked of him : and, in particular, he has declared that God will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.

Add to this, that it is a part of the ministerial office, not only to instruct the people, but also to bless and to pray for them. For Christ came to bless and to save mankind : and as, while on earth, he prosecuted this work in his own person ; so did he commit the same work to be, after he should be taken up into Heaven, carried on by the Bishops and pastors of his Church. For to them, in the persons of his holy Apostles, he thus delivered his commission and authority : “ As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you *.” Consider then the nature of the present occasion : here the serious

* John xx. 21.

and solemn supplication of the Bishop, of the inferior ministers, and of the congregation, is offered up to God in behalf of those who now come to dedicate themselves to his service: this is accompanied by the laying on of hands, as an ancient and solemn method of designating and distinguishing the persons to whom the prayer relates. We cannot then but discover in such a ministration, every thing required for the warrant of a hope, that God will favourably regard the prayers thus offered, and dispense the comfort and succour of his Holy Spirit to those for whom he is thus entreated. If then we look no farther than the particulars now stated, we must needs acquiesce in the judgment which Bishop Burnett * has pronounced upon this subject: "In this action," says he, "there is nothing but what is in the power of the Church to do, *even without any other warrant or precedent*. The doing all things to order and to edifying will authorize a Church to do all this."

But our authority for the practice of Confirmation is not limited to those *general* promises of Scripture, which declare to us the effect and benefit of prayer. The Apostles themselves did, as you have seen, lay

* On the Article. XXV. See Wake on the Catechism, §. 52.

their hands on those Christian converts who had been previously baptized : and you have also seen, that as a consequence of this apostolical ministration, the Holy Spirit was given to the persons thus confirmed. Now certainly the power of sanctification, being uniformly and indispensably necessary in order to qualify man for the service and favour of his Maker, must be equally needful for him under all circumstances of his condition, and in every period of his existence : the purpose therefore and propriety of this ministration, cannot be justly viewed as reaching no further than the Apostles' age.

For it cannot, as we conceive, be said with justice, that the imposition of hands thus recorded was practised with a sole regard to those extraordinary and miraculous powers, which God, with a view to the speedy and effectual diffusion of his holy faith, abundantly conferred on the early Church : there is, on the contrary, most weighty reason for believing, that it related in an equal degree to those ordinary gifts and graces, which are at all times needful for the personal sanctification of Christians. We, therefore, maintain the propriety of teaching, that the Apostolical ordinance of Confirmation was, as a standing and perpetual ordinance, intended to

be applied, through every age of the Church, to the spiritual benefit of God's elect people.

Among the grounds which present themselves for the justification of this view, the strongest is that afforded by a passage of St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews. Here the doctrine of the *laying on of hands* * is found enumerated and classed (along with those of baptism, faith, repentance, the resurrection, and a future judgment,) among those first elementary principles of general Christianity which are suited to the condition, and needful to the circumstances, of every disciple of Christ. This laying on of hands can, I believe, justly be viewed in no other light than as an Apostolical usage, of which the present practice of Confirmation by the Bishop discovers to us the legitimate continuance.

We, therefore, have reason to believe, that the rite of Confirmation has been handed down to us from the very earliest age of the Church ; and that it did, as a means of spiritual advantage to all baptized persons, originate in that age, under the sanction and authority of the Apostles themselves.

This view does not militate against a just and proper estimate of the sacrament, by which we are first admitted to the grace of the Evangelical cove-

* Heb. vi. 2.

nant. For the true state of the case is thus. Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration; we believe that in that sacrament, to all who duly receive it, the grace and power of God's Holy Spirit is in such manner conveyed, that the baptized person, being now in covenant with God, becomes, by virtue of covenanted mercy and power, capable of subduing the natural corruption of his heart, and of doing works pleasing and acceptable to God. This is the beginning of the new life; it is, as one of our great divines * expresses it, a step to our sanctification that hath not any before it. The Christian thus baptized is said to be born again. That is to say, man is now by baptism born to the purposes of holiness, grace, and eternal life; whereas by the former birth, which was the beginning of the natural life, he was born only to wickedness, wrath, and condemnation. "As we are not naturally men," says Hooker †, "without *birth*, so neither are we Christian men in the eye of the Church of God but by *new birth*; nor, according to the manifest ordinary course of divine dispensation, new-born, but by that Baptism which both declareth and maketh us Christians."

* Hooker, Eccl. Pol. V. 60.

† Id. *ibid*.

But though the seed of grace be first sown, though the capacity of holy thoughts and purposes be first given at the due reception of baptism; the Apostolical ministry of Confirmation seems to have been instituted, in order that *further* grace might be sought and obtained, before the new disciple was considered as firmly rooted and established in the faith.

For proof of this as matter of fact, we may allege the following narrative of St. Luke: "When the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost *."

On this passage it has been justly remarked:—"These converts had received all the benefits conferred by Baptism. If some *additional* ministration had not been necessary, for what reason is it to be supposed that two Apostles should have gone from Jerusalem to lay hands upon those who had been baptized in Samaria †?"

* Acts viii. 14—17.

† Shepherd on the Common Prayer.

The natural impression suggested by the words is, that something further *was* necessary to these Samaritan converts. It is, therefore, a matter of the deepest interest to ascertain: What was the nature of that additional benefit of which they stood in need? For we believe, that they were already born again of water and of the Holy Spirit; this is merely applying to their case the doctrine of Scripture and of the Catholic Church respecting the grace of baptism: nevertheless we are expressly told, that as yet the Holy Spirit had fallen upon none of them.

In order to the explanation of this subject it will be well to declare, so far at least as our present purpose is concerned, what the effect of Baptism is. In doing this, I will confine myself to that brevity which the occasion requires; and I will aim at that simplicity, from which, in treating this matter, I think it dangerous to depart. For as to all attempts at defining the precise manner of the Holy Spirit's regenerating operation, I cannot but think that they are strongly discountenanced by those words of our Saviour: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit *." Sure I am, that

* John iii. 8.

such exact and perfect knowledge cannot be needful to us: for multitudes who have been regenerated, have afterwards grown in grace and been consummated in glory, though they never aspired to any such accurate comprehension of the benefit which they had obtained.

Respecting the grace of baptism, we may safely affirm this: it bestows a *capacity* of holiness. Of holiness man is by nature incapable: and the removal of this natural incapacity is an appropriate benefit of baptism. For this sacrament is the appointed means of our first obtaining remission of sin: of our first deliverance from the wrath of God: of our being adopted into his favour: of being qualified for his sanctifying influences: of being *entitled by covenant* to the grace from which *by nature* we were *excluded*.

These advantages regeneration confers: but in order to our everlasting happiness, there is required something farther, which it does *not* confer.

For, besides the *capacity* of holiness, it is necessary to true sanctification, that there be the *active power* of it working upon a man's soul, actually prompting him to that which is good in thought, desire, and action. That every case of regeneration is attended with this active power, is a position

which, if we admit the validity of infant baptism, seems to contradict all our knowledge; and it certainly contradicts those constructions of Scripture language which have been sanctioned by the general approbation of the Christian Church *.

* If it be thought that I have here expressed myself in too strong terms, I would beg the reader's attention to the following passage from a learned writer; and I am the more desirous of doing so, because it imbodyes the sentiments of an illustrious father of the Church, whom the modern disciples of Calvin look upon, I believe, with great veneration. It ought to be premised, that this author is here discussing the *effect of baptism*: that effect being, on his view, one and the same thing with *regeneration*. When I say that it is so on *his* view, I am far from inclined to stamp on it the notion of peculiarity; for I do not find that any *different* view was ever acknowledged by any community of professing Christians earlier than about the middle of the sixteenth century. "Most of the pædobaptists," says he, "go no farther than St. Austin does; they hold that God, *by his Spirit*, does, at the time of baptism, seal and apply to the infant that is there dedicated to him, the promises of the covenant of which he is capable, viz. adoption, pardon of sin, translation from the state of nature to that of grace, &c. On which account the infant is said to be *regenerated of* [or by] *the Spirit*. Not that God does by any miracle at that time illuminate or convert the mind of the child. And, for original sin, or the corruption of nature, they hold that God, by his covenant, does abolish the guilt of it, receives the child to his mercy in Christ, and consigns to him, by promise, such grace as shall afterward, by the use of means, if he live, be sufficient to keep it under, but not wholly to extirpate it in this life. It is left as the subject of

Yet it is certain that this active power is derived from the Holy Spirit of God, and that it is obtained by believers in the use of those means of grace which God for that end has provided in the Church.

It cannot, therefore, be unreasonable to believe, that the Apostolical practice of Confirmation related to the obtaining of a further degree of grace than that which properly belongs to regeneration. That practice itself, as it applied to those who were already regenerated, almost constrains us to think that it did. And we may thus regard the Apostles themselves, in the exercise of a power belonging to their lawful authority, as bringing the new converts of the Church to the full experience of those quick-

trial, and of a continual Christian warfare. And this is the opinion of *St. Austin**, and of the ancients in general." (Wall's History of Infant Baptism, Part I. Chap. xv. §. 5. p. 148. ed. 1705.) This judgment respecting the benefit of baptism, is sanctioned (as appears from the concluding words of the quotation) by great and venerable authority. If it be true, there cannot be any difficulty in comprehending, that something further than baptism, should be wanted to the admission of a Christian to the full communion of the Church: nor will there, on this supposition, be any absurdity in a belief, that confirmation was instituted with a view to the attainment of that end.

* "Contra Julianum, l. vi. c. 5, 6, 7."

ening graces which at their baptism they had been made capable of receiving. I would not say, that these graces are never for the first time vouchsafed in any other way: but if this be an ordinance of the Church, especially relating to this benefit, and resulting from an authority established by Christ; I would strongly represent the danger of contemning it. For if men will neglect a solemn means of sanctification, duly and legitimately appointed by those to whom God has given a competent authority for that purpose; I cannot myself see, that such persons can expect, from the Giver of sanctification, the graces needful to eternal life. Such as is the authority of the Church to require, the same must be our obligation to obey: he that resists a legitimate authority resists the giver of that authority: and a resistance so full of provocation and contempt must needs be attended with great peril.

The conduciveness of this ordinance to the general sanctification of Christians, and the necessity of its administration, will be further apparent, if we contemplate its application with a distinct regard to the different circumstances and condition of two classes of persons, who, having been baptized, become the proper subjects of its administration.

1st. Of those baptized into the Christian Church, the very earliest were such as, having come to maturity of years, embraced the Gospel on the ground of reasonable and deliberate conviction. With regard to them, it is not unreasonable to suppose, that the administration of this sacred ordinance may have been specially designed, to confirm them in the seriousness of their holy purpose, and to obtain for them an increase of power and strength towards the maintenance of it. Good purposes are oftentimes more sincere and fervent than they are lasting: for the word may be received with joy in a soul where it takes no effectual root*. The danger of their being so is *peculiarly* great, when, as in the case of those early Christians, they call upon men to encounter terrific dangers and endure painful renunciations. Nor, if we regard only the *general* purpose of a Christian life, is this danger at any time inconsiderable: for that purpose, at all times, calls upon men to renounce the world and the flesh; to deny themselves; to take up the cross; to maintain a bold and perilous warfare. We cannot therefore wonder, if, with respect to all enlisted under the banner of Christ, it was judged

* Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

necessary, that they should evince the sincerity and stedfastness of their profession, by a second voluntary and solemn dedication of themselves to God, and should, at the same time, through the pastoral ministration of those to whom our Lord has delegated the superintendence of his Church, become renewed and strengthened with more abundant grace towards the maintenance of their holy calling.

2ndly. But we have the strongest reasons to believe, that not only persons of mature age, but also infants, were, during the very first age of the Gospel, admitted into the Church by baptism : and those reasons are equally forcible to satisfy us respecting the purpose of the divine will, that such baptism of infants should continue to be the order of the Church as long as the Church itself should continue upon earth. Now if we regard the case of these infants ; if we consider the needful provision for their spiritual welfare, which every future age would equally call for : we shall then see in so strong a light the fitness and propriety of Confirmation, considered as a standing ordinance, that we can scarcely imagine it possible, but that this ordinance, or some other of similar design, should have been appointed to meet the exigence of the case.

It will not therefore, on this view of the subject, be wrong to suppose, that the ordinance of Confirmation may have been appointed with a principal view to the case of infants, for the purpose of thus sealing, by their own act and deed, the privilege and obligation of the Christian covenant.

We know indeed, that infants are capable of the divine grace and mercy. Nor is it in any degree unreasonable to suppose, that the first seed of holiness may, through the power and goodness of God, be implanted in the soul during childhood: for it is equally difficult to imagine how the seed of wickedness and corruption, (which had been sown by nature,) previously existed there; yet we know that it did so exist. And, though the active working of the principle of holiness be not, during childhood, visibly discovered by outward signs and evidence; it seems quite reasonable to acknowledge, that such principle may, at that early age, lie dormant and unseen, in the same way that those powers of bodily strength and activity do, which afterwards shine forth in manhood.

Those who profess to be perplexed at the existence of a power of holiness given to infants at their baptism, and who allege, on that ground, the impropriety of calling them regenerate; might find, upon

reflection, an equal difficulty, in supposing the possibility of infants being affected by original sin. For they are, during the earliest stage of life, as much incapable of manifesting, by actual guilt, the proof of their natural corruption, as they are of bringing forth to light, by the actual fruits of holiness and obedience, the proper effects or evidence of their regenerate character.

But, however strenuously we may vindicate the reality of that effect, which we believe that the mercy of God has connected with this sacrament; we must not be insensible of the subsequent obligations, which are required in order to a full and entire participation of its benefits. The Gospel is a *covenant*; and the notion of a *contract between two parties* is essential to the right conception of it. Now baptism is the seal and token of this covenant. And though for infants, while yet unable to contract for themselves, there may be provided a way of mercy and an approach to the grace of God; yet all professors of the Gospel are to remember, that our holy faith is a reasonable service, and that it is required, in order to our salvation, that we should take up our obligation, as being personally and voluntarily bound by that covenant; that we should take it up on the ground of reasonable con-

viction, and ever afterwards sincerely labour to fulfil it.

Consider, then, on the one hand, the terms of the Gospel covenant, which thus demand the concurrence of our own deliberate choice and voluntary act; consider, on the other hand, the nature of infant baptism, which admits it not: and surely, while we believe that infant baptism is agreeable to the word and will of God, it will not seem unreasonable to suppose, that this sacred ordinance of Confirmation was instituted by the Apostles themselves, as applicable to all who are baptized into the faith of Christ, and instituted also, with an especial view to the ratification of the baptismal covenant. In this light, we may properly regard it as conveying, *on the part of the person previously baptized*, a confirmation of the baptismal profession; and as attended, through the appointed ministration, with a *divine* confirmation of the baptismal grace and privilege.

Add to this, that not only the *faith*, but also the *profession*, of the Gospel, is required as a qualification of every disciple of Christ. Yet it is very obvious, that this profession cannot be made by an infant at baptism. We discover then, in this particular also, the great necessity of Confirmation, for

the purpose of completing, as early as possible, the things which, though requisite to the due reception of Baptism, could not be fulfilled in infancy. For without such completion, we cannot see that the pastors of the Church have any warrant for regarding men as living members of Christ's body, qualified for the means of grace provided in the Church for the spiritual sustenance of their future lives. That such profession should be made to the authorized ministers of Christ, must be judged necessary: for they only are the persons empowered by Christ to transact the things belonging to his covenant of mercy. That it should be reserved to the Bishops, who are the highest order of such ministers, we judge to be most fitting and convenient: because it agrees with the practice of the Apostles, to which we have already referred: Bishops being the authorized successors of those to whom it was said by Christ, "as my father hath sent me, even so send I you*." For of this highest order, the inferior pastors of the Church are but the delegates and deputies, having their lawful administration limited and restrained within narrower bounds than those which belong to the office of a Bishop:

* John xi. 21.

and the imposition of hands for the confirmation of the baptized, is a part of the Divine ministration, in which these subordinate ministers have not been formally empowered and authorized to act.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ADMONITION TO PARENTS AND SPONSORS.

VIEWING then the ordinance of Confirmation agreeably to the foregoing exposition, it will appear, that there are required in those who come to it two things: First, that they should, voluntarily and of their own act, embrace the covenant of our Lord Jesus Christ; secondly, that they should make an open and sincere profession of their so doing. Now of these two things, the latter cannot be if the former is not; and the former cannot be done in any reasonable, nor consequently in any sufficient way, without previous instruction and consideration. For these things, namely, first, steadfastness of faith and purpose; secondly, sincerity of profession; thirdly, (as means of absolute necessity towards the two former) previous knowledge and consideration: these things, I say, are of absolute necessity, in order to derive from the reception of Baptism, the grace and mercy of which that sacrament is the appointed channel. (This, of course, applies only

to such as have come to years of discretion : it cannot be supposed to detract from the Divine grace and mercy to children.) These things, by reason of the tender age of infants, could not be at their baptism : the Church has, therefore, appointed the time of Confirmation as the proper season for the serious and deliberate performance of them.

Such is the needful preparation of those who come to be Confirmed : and therefore it is to this point that I most seriously claim your attention, in those remaining observations which this occasion demands from me.

Here a very painful consideration occurs : it is one which I am bound to notice. The few plain and simple truths relating to this ordinance are remarkably easy to learn : notwithstanding which it happens, that the degree of religious instruction possessed by persons desiring Confirmation, is, in very many instances, wretchedly defective ; in many others, deplorably erroneous. It would be improper to notice this circumstance, without seriously advertng to that neglect of parental duty in which, generally speaking, it must have originated. Who can help feeling, that it is the first duty of a parent's love, to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ? Consider only, as it affects

the happiness of your children, the immeasurable importance of this duty. Reflect for a moment on the wretched consequences which must arise from a failure in this your parental obligation; on the inevitable wickedness and misery of your offspring, which must result from it; on the griefs which must accrue to yourselves from their future undutiful carriage; and on the remorse and anguish which must naturally be your portion as the responsible authors of their fatal miscarriages.

Look forward, I pray you, to the day when God shall arise to judge terribly the earth! What will then be the dismay of your souls, if you should be met with this reproach: "Behold the children whom God has given you! They were ignorant and you instructed them not: they made themselves vile and you restrained them not. Why did you not teach them at home, and bring them to the public ordinances and worship of God. Why did you not train them up in piety and devotion? Not only did you neglect to give them good instruction: you gave them bad example. See now the issue of your conduct: they are now the companions of your doom, and will be so of your torment. Thus have you destroyed those whose happiness you were, by the strongest ties of duty

and affection, bound to promote. Behold! the books are now open, and not one prayer is there upon record that ever you put up for your children. No memorial is there even of a single hour you ever spent, to train them up in a regard to God and to their duty. On the contrary you have, in many ways, contributed to their ruin and helped forward their destruction. How could you thus hate your own flesh and hate your own souls? Better had it been for your children, and better had it been for you, that they had never been born." Would not such a charge as this make every joint of you to tremble? And how will it enhance the anguish of your soul when, to all the other appalling circumstances of the great and terrible day, shall be added, the reproaches of your children themselves, accusing you as the guilty authors of their destruction. "I am not able," says Archbishop Tillotson, (from whom I have derived these affecting suggestions) "to make so dreadful a representation of this matter as it deserves. But I would by all this," says he, "if it be possible, awaken parents to a sense of their duty, and terrify them out of this gross and shameful neglect*."

It would be quite unreasonable to expect, that

* Sermon LII: Concerning the education of children.

by virtue of any of those means of grace which God has provided, the proper fruits of a Christian life will discover themselves in any person, from whom the requisite knowledge and discipline of a Christian life have been withholden. The grace of God, as a supernatural aid, is, according to the regular mode of the divine proceedings, so dispensed, as not to supersede the necessity of human care in the teaching of Christian truth, and the inculcating of Christian motives, but to supply that power and energy, which, after the utmost care of man, are still wanting to the purposes of a divine life; that power and energy which God inwardly administers to the soul by the motions of his blessed Spirit, and without which the labour of man must be vain and ineffectual: the dispensation of grace being, in this respect, similar to the government of the natural world, in which we find that the dew and rain of heaven are afforded, not as a permission of sloth and inactivity to man, but for the purpose of crowning and giving effect to, the labour of his hands. If the case were otherwise, we should not find in Scripture so many declarations, to the purpose of representing the want of divine knowledge as the death of the soul; nor so many injunctions which call for the exertion of parental

and pastoral care, in the conveyance of that knowledge to young and ignorant persons.

Consider then the supernatural aid of divine grace as intended, according to the general plan of God's administration, to operate as a blessing super-added to the labour and effect of human instruction, and not in the way of any extraordinary revelation, or of any extraordinary impulses communicated independently of knowledge previously obtained : and you cannot but see, in the strongest light, how necessary it is, in order to the conveyance of this knowledge, that parents should consider themselves as workers together with God for the spiritual welfare of their offspring ; that they should reflect with serious anxiety on the responsibility of their station ; and that they should contemplate, with fearful apprehension, the very criminal nature of that neglect, which, in the case of those who ought to be the dearest to them, frustrates the purpose of the divine love to mankind. And when we see that divine knowledge communicated by human instrumentality, is, ordinarily speaking, made by the appointment of God so essential to the realization of his own merciful purposes ; we cannot but see also, the necessity of that provision, which the Church has made in behalf of those helpless and ignorant children who

are presented to baptism, when we find, that she requires sponsors to undertake the charge of conveying to the baptized child, those principles of faith and piety which, according to the divine appointment, are to operate in concurrence with the grace of baptism. I need only add, that the mere mention of this subject, carries with it an implied censure of the strongest kind, with regard to the levity of too many persons in undertaking the sponsorial office, and to the subsequent neglect of its obligations.

CHAPTER V.

AN EXHORTATION TO THOSE WHO DESIRE CONFIRMATION.

As the duty of parents, with regard to the qualifications of those who now come to be Confirmed, is first in order of time, I have judged it proper to advert to it before I proceed to the admonitions, which the occasion suggests as proper to be addressed to those persons themselves. With these admonitions I shall now proceed to the conclusion of my discourse.

To you then who desire to offer yourselves to the Bishop for Confirmation, I now particularly address myself, with an earnest and anxious claim for your devout and fixed attention.

You are to consider, that the profession of the Gospel is a reasonable service, and that those who undertake it must do it upon reasonable grounds: this could not be done at the reception of baptism in your infant years: you are therefore called upon to do it now. You are also to remember,

that it is the covenant of baptism which admits you to a state of salvation; but that the grace and mercy conveyed by baptism can be available to eternal life, only in those, whose sincere and serious purpose it is to fulfil the obligation of the covenant.

Remember then I pray you, that this ~~is~~ is a matter between God and yourselves: and that all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom you have to do. If there be any thing false and hollow in your profession, shall not God find it out? There is no darkness which can hide a wicked purpose from his view: he has denounced the most awful severity on all hypocrites and on every one that maketh a lie: and you cannot doubt, that the blackest guilt of hypocrisy is theirs, who, while they thus act a deceitful part towards the Searcher of hearts, convert into a mockery that gracious covenant, which he, in the death of his Son, has provided for their salvation.

Reflect most seriously on the nature of that covenant to which you are about to dedicate yourselves: consider the awful interest which depends on your behaviour relating to it. Your calling is holiness, and the end of it everlasting life. Should you maintain the obligation of this calling; you will

reap, in a state of endless joy, the benefit of Christ's precious death and all-prevailing merit. Should you, by a profane or reckless life, fall away from it; you are to consider beforehand, what your danger will be. You are to remember, that the Spirit of God will not always strive with evil men: that lesser sins prepare the mind for greater: that wilful transgression frequently leads to hardness of heart and blindness of judgment: and that these are the common forerunners of destruction. So little hope is there in regard to those who wilfully go astray, that any available means can ever be employed for building up the ruins of their former innocence and peace!

No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. The Gospel calls upon us, not only to enter on a holy life, but to continue in it: its promises are only to them that persevere. Therefore count well the cost of your undertaking, now that you are entering on it. Have a full view of all the struggles of a Christian life. Contemplate the power of that evil nature which adheres to us; which is continually prompting to the resistance of God's will; which is ever diverting the mind from heaven and holiness, from grace and glory, and bending it to the pursuit

of vain objects and sensual delight ; which will ever fight against us while this life shall last ; and of which the genuine fruits are impurity, wickedness, and death. Contemplate the many incidents of life, which, in your future commerce with the world, will throw fuel on this unholy fire ; the many temptations which are likely to occur, both of forbidden pleasure and of forbidden profit ; the captivation of worldly pride, the witchcraft of loose and debauched company ; especially contemplate, before you encounter them, those wicked and seducing arts, so unhappily employed by the wantonness and depravity of each sex for the corruption of the other ; reflect on the house which is the way of hell, which goeth down to the chambers of death, and on the paths which they who follow take not hold of the paths of life. Reflect on all the arduous duties, the painful conflicts, the self-denial, and the bearing of the cross, which are essential to a Christian life. Reflect, that our fidelity to Christ is to be maintained under all circumstances ; that it must not be seduced by any invitations of pleasure, or shaken by any extremity of suffering, or by the most terrific aspect of danger.

What shall we say then ? Shall we decline a Christian life by reason of the self-denial to which

it calls us? God forbid. This will not avail us, and the reason must be plain to all men. When the Gospel tenders an offer of mercy, it leaves no other choice than this: we must either embrace that offer or perish. It is not for us to say unto God: "depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways *." If we will be deaf to the entreaties of his love, we must nevertheless, whether we will or not, be subject to his power and amenable to his judgment.

But with regard to this matter, it will contribute to the right direction of your choice, if you will weigh the evils, connected with that course of life which is the contrary to the one now recommended to you.

If you will not bear the yoke of Christ, you *must* bear another yoke infinitely more painful. What this yoke is, you may readily understand. There are men sinking under pains and infirmities, which have been brought on by a debauched and profligate life. There are others ruined and made wretched, by squandering, without a single thought of God or of the poor, all that they had on their lusts. There are others brought, by their crimes,

* Job xxi. 14.

to eat the bread and water of affliction in the dark solitude of a gaol ; passing thence perhaps to an untimely end, by public justice and with public infamy. Such persons there are : such in their case are the effects of declining the yoke of Christ : and of such persons it must be the portion, to be void of reasonable comfort either from the past, the present, or the future : since pain and sorrow are their present feeling, memory can find nothing but that matter for remorse, and the dark prospect of the future quenches every ray of hope and of joy. This I say on the supposition, that these persons have maintained their purpose to the end : if, under God's mercy, they should have come to repentance before it is too late, then their subsequent convictions bear witness to the truth of what I say ; namely, that the yoke of Christ is less galling than the yoke of sin.

But I do not say that a wicked life is always seen under this forbidden aspect. Sometimes it appears to our view, clothed in purple and fine linen, and revelling in sumptuous fare. One man may be seen selling his innocence for gold, and another panting for honour like a child captivated with a bubble : such men may be seen to stop at no crime which stands between them and their object : they may be

seen, not disappointed of their aim, but reaching it: yet will such a man often be so tormented by his own conscience and the restless wickedness of his heart, that all the arrows of God shall seem to fasten on his soul.

Can you however imagine any case, in which the painful consequences of a guilty conduct do not overtake a man during this life? Such a case is surely of rare occurrence. But even here the case is not in the least degree mended: for it is only the case of fishes, which are taken in an evil net when a sudden destruction cometh upon them. The holiness of God's attributes is concerned, that retribution should take place: that which is left behind in this world, must be filled up in the pains and sorrows of the world to come. For we may know of a certainty, that sooner or later, they who plough iniquity and sow wickedness shall reap the same: by the blast of God they shall perish, and by the breath of his nostrils they shall be consumed *. "He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption †."

Now in weighing the hardships of a good life, the miseries of a wicked one, such as we have now no-

* Job iv. 8.

† Gal. vi. 8.

ticed, are to be placed in the other scale. Without this, a wise determination of choice cannot be made. And this choice will readily, by every judicious person, be determined on the following principle: the pains and miseries of a wicked life are the unavoidable portion of those who follow it, and they are far greater than all the hardships and difficulties of religion; therefore religion is to be preferred.

But this is not all that ought to be said on the side of religion. After all, be its difficulties, its hardships, and its self-denial, what they may, these ought not to move us, nor to make us halt between two opinions: for there is holden out to us a power of overcoming them all; and, if we employ this power with fidelity to ourselves, such hardships shall in no degree whatever hinder our progress to heaven. Nay more, they shall raise us to the glory of conquerors, and be to us the occasion of greater joy and of a more glorious reward.

God, who has set before you life and death, has given you the power of choosing life, and of fleeing from death. "Fear not, little flock," said our blessed Lord, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom *." God, who willeth all men to

* Luke xii. 32.

be saved, will not withhold from you the means and the power of salvation. Consider, therefore, what these means are: consider also the use of them which you are called upon to make.

God hath given his only begotten Son to be the life of the world, that all men through him should be saved. He is the way, the truth, and the life; and no man cometh to the Father but by him. It is only through him that we can live the life of God: our power of doing so results only from his blood, his merit, and his precious expiation.

In order to effect this, it is necessary that we should be united to him. We can bear no fruit unto holiness and eternal life otherwise than as we are so. When the branch is cut off from the stem it withers and dies: the same, with regard to the spiritual life, is the case of every one separated from Christ. Such is the doctrine of Christ himself. "Abide in me," says he, "and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them

into the fire, and they are burned *.” See then how necessary it is that you should maintain a close and constant union with Christ.

If this be duly felt, it will be natural to ask, How is this union to be effected, and how is it to be kept up? I will proceed to satisfy this enquiry.

The union with Christ commences at baptism: for as we are taught to believe that we are members of *his* body, and members of *one body, whereof Christ is the head*†, so it is to be considered, that we are first admitted into that state of membership by the sacramental grace, of which we become partakers on our admission into the Church. On this (as having been a point of previous instruction) I shall not dwell further at this time: it will be more to my purpose to explain to you, how the blessed union thus begun may be continued and maintained.

First: to fly from sin and to walk in the commandments of Christ, is a great, an effectual, and an indispensable, qualification for keeping up a vital union with Christ. For Christ himself tells us, that if we keep his commandments, we shall abide

* John xv. 4.

† Ephes. iv. 15, 16. v. 23. 1 Cor. xi. 27. Rom. xii. 5.

in his love *. This qualification for the love and indwelling of Christ ought to pervade the whole life; we will proceed to consider some of the more particular acts and duties by which this union is maintained.

Secondly then : among these the study of God's word and meditation upon it, hold a chief place. "The words that I speak unto you," says Christ, "they are spirit and they are life †." God's word is the nourishment of the soul, and the sustenance of the divine life : it is called in Scripture the pure milk of the word, and the growth of a Christian in grace and piety is therein spoken of as being effected by it ‡. I might, therefore, not improperly address you in words similar to those of the injunction which God, of old time, delivered to the leader of his chosen people : "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth ; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein : for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success §." And remember, most especially, that you are to go to

* John xv. 10.

† John vi. 63.

‡ 1 Pet. ii. 2.

§ Joshua i. 8.

tain my innocence? Should some wrathful or injurious person unexpectedly come into converse with me; am I ready to behave myself with perfect meekness and benignity, unconcerned for myself, and distressed only for the sinner who molests me? Should some dreadful shock of calamity light upon me of a sudden, am I ready to bear it with perfect resignation, and with an entire preference of God's will to my own?—While we thus commune with our own hearts, we may know, what are their most unprotected and assailable points; and, with a special regard to them, we may pray and seek for the strength of God to sustain our weakness, and for the power of grace to supply the infirmity of the flesh. But especially shall we be made sensible of our danger, and of the necessity of quickening our spiritual improvement, if we thus enquire—Am I now ready to die and to meet God? for I know not that I have an hour to live.—With these thoughts on our minds, we shall be more sensible of the proper force belonging to that divine caution, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life *.”

* Luke xxi. 34.

Concerning the various means of grace to which I have thus directed your attention, it is hoped, that you will, under God's blessing, receive abundant instruction and frequent exhortation in the public ministration of the divine word, and in the study of pious and devotional books: but a word in season may fitly now be introduced, because the occasion is strikingly adapted to promote a deep and lasting impression. In relation to the Lord's Supper, I entreat you to give no heed to those idle and weak excuses which are so commonly advanced to discourage from the fulfilment of a most indispensable duty: for, if the commandment of Christ have the power of obligation, you cannot but consider it as indispensable: and you have justly been taught, in the words of the Catechism, to speak of it as "necessary to salvation." Such excuses, be assured, will never, in the sight of God, justify your neglect. Let me hope, that you will seize the first opportunity of presenting yourselves at the holy table; that you will ever delight, at those seasons which the Church affords, to remember, in the way that he himself appointed, the Lord who bought you; and that you will ever be careful to avoid the dreadful condition set forth in those words of our Lord, "Verily,

verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you*."

With regard also to prayer, to self-examination, and the study of the divine word; I entreat you to make them a part of your daily employment. Be assured that they will shed a benign influence of sanctity and peace over the thoughts of your heart and the work of your hands. And here I most especially wish to guard you against that common excuse, of those who say, that they have no time for such employments. What, no time to pray and to examine your lives! it has often been said, but never, I believe, in one single instance with truth. It is the customary language of those, who make the more weighty engagements of life give way to those that are less so: for these employments, which they neglect, are far more important than those which they pursue, and which, as they allege, afford no time to think of their souls and of the meat which endureth to everlasting life. But it is a vain pretence: for I am fully persuaded, that the more regularly you fulfil these duties, the more time you will have on your hands for every innocent and

* John vi. 53.

needful work : all such works being carried on more expeditiously as well as more prosperously under God's blessing, which is obtained in the way of these observances, than under his displeasure, which is incurred by the neglect of them.

It is this indeed, I mean the divine blessing, which furnishes the proper and only just ground of encouragement in every enterprise of man : for except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it. It is on this you are taught, by the solemnity of confirmation, to place your reliance when you enter on the work of a godly life. For as you now ratify the covenant of your Baptism, you are not taught to do it with any confidence in your own power, but with a trust in the grace of God and in the succours of his Holy Spirit. And it is in order to the obtaining of these succours, agreeably to the promise of God, and according to the ministration of his church ; that you are now about to present yourselves at this solemn ordinance. These succours may be obtained by all who duly seek them ; and when obtained, will make it easy and pleasant to fulfil the necessary work. For the strength of Christ is made perfect in the weakness of man : and the power and glory of God are made manifest, in the sufficiency of his

grace for the wants of those, who, in themselves, are quite insufficient for any good thing. When we view the difficulties of a Christian life in connexion with these succours, then may it be truly said of religion, that her ways are ways of pleasantness and that all her paths are peace; that the yoke of Christ is easy and his burden light.

Indeed, to such a course of life we cannot do full justice, unless we acknowledge, that it is the easiest and least troublesome that we can possibly take. "For we must either conquer our lusts or gratify them: and the former of these is not so difficult as the latter. The ambitious may grow content sooner than great: the covetous may sooner moderate their desires than satisfy them: and the unclean may more easily gain a chaste spirit than they can satisfy the ravings of a wandering lust*."

Be not unwilling then, I say again, to take upon you the yoke of Christ. Be strong and very courageous: for faith overcometh the world, and Christ will bestow that faith on every obedient disciple: to such he will manifest himself and his doctrine. Be stedfast and unmoveable in your

* Lucas's Practical Christianity, p. 232. ed. 1721.

holy purpose. Put on the whole armour of God ; that ye may be able to withstand all the wiles of the devil, and having done all to stand. And may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ: To whom be glory for ever and ever.

PASTORAL DISCOURSES

APPLICABLE TO

CONFIRMED PERSONS.



SERMON I.

THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING THE MEANS OF GRACE :
ILLUSTRATED IN THE FALL OF ST. PETER.

MATT. xxvi. 71.

*Then began he to curse and to swear, saying,
I know not the man. And immediately the cock
crew.*

IN the whole compass of sacred record there are few occurrences which carry a deeper interest, or a stronger admonition, than the scene unfolded in these words. We have here one of the most eminent saints of the Christian church; a man belonging to the glorious company of the apostles and the noble army of martyrs; an apostle, distinguished among his brethren by the steadfastness of his fidelity, and by the warmth of his attachment to his master; an apostle whom that master had dignified with the most honourable commendation, and whom he had declared to be the foundation-rock of his everlasting church. Such was Peter. In what

light does he now appear? As a man stained with all the black characters of lying and perjury, of breaking his vow and denying his Lord: of denying that Lord, who was not only, by virtue of a particular relation, his own master, but who was moreover the Lord God, the Lord of life and death and all things!

We shall do well to consider this in its application to ourselves, as a warning against spiritual security: for it strongly enforces that necessary caution, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*."

Now the purpose of this application will, I think, best be answered, if we enquire into the causes which led to the commission of that sin which we here find upon record. For if we can discover these causes, we shall the better understand the nature of our own dangers, and the needful means of our own defence. These causes you will find to be chiefly two; first, an error of the *mind*, secondly, an error of the *conduct*: each connected with the other: both operating previously to the great disaster, and both in every possible case of their operation, pregnant with the most fatal influence on the souls of men.

* 1 Cor. x. 12.

I. First, there was an error of the mind. The great foundation of this Apostle's crime appears to have been no other, than a reliance on his own virtue. He who places his confidence in this will surely fall. In the present instance, a very severe trial was at hand. Of this trial our blessed Lord had warned his apostles: he had predicted that their faith would be shaken. "All ye," said he, "shall be offended * because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad †." To this Peter replied in language, which plainly shews, that he relied for the maintenance of his fidelity, on no other support than his own virtue. For he speaks not of the divine grace and blessing; but his own will, and his own resolution, are the declared ground of his confidence: "Though all men," said he, "shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended ‡." This gives occasion to our Lord to foretell the horrid crime which Peter himself, in a few hours, would commit, and by which he would, for cowardice, falsehood, and treachery, stand pre-eminently distinguished among those, who were involved in the common guilt of forsaking

* Or, *shall be occasioned to fall.* † Matt xxvi. 31. ‡ 1b. v. 33.

their master. "Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice *." And now, as if in defiance of the awful warning and of the infallible prophet, the strain of presumption swells into a bolder note. "Peter said unto him, though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee †." Such was the vanity of this man. He was going forth to a conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil: each of these was about to assail him with the hottest fury. How does he prepare for the fight? Elated with confidence in himself, he thinks not of the armour of God, but looks to his own reason and his own virtue as the weapons of his warfare.

Thus prepared for the dark hour of temptation and trial, can we wonder that he fell? With more reason may we wonder at the boundless mercy of God, that he fell not, like the traitor Judas, to rise no more. For our Lord, in his previous ministry, had declared, "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven ‡." Well may we admire the depth of the riches of divine love, that could open the gate of mercy to him who had sinned against this

* Matt. xxvi. 34.

† Ib. 35.

‡ Ib. x. 33.

righteous denunciation: that could change the apostate into an intrepid preacher of the word: that could give him fortitude to reach the crown of martyrdom; to die for the faith of Him whom once he denied; and to water with his blood the infant growth of that Church, in the light and grace of which we communicate! But as to his crime, this, under the circumstances of the case, should occasion no surprise. For the Divine protection can be our only safeguard, the divine power our only strength: and it cannot justly be expected that such protection and power should be extended to those who are confident in themselves. God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Peter vainly relied on his own virtue: it was therefore fit that he should, for the warning and edification of those who were to follow him, become an example of human weakness and depravity.

This man, indeed, is justly to be revered for the general sanctity of his life, and for the fervent zeal of his devotion to the cause of God: but he is not the only person entitled to this reverence, in whom the sacred records afford us such an example. Many others there are, whom we are taught to regard with honour, as men who wrought righteousness and became the favourites of God, in whose conduct

we, nevertheless, descry very lamentable blemishes, and in some instances, most aggravated wickedness. Are not these so many decided proofs of that corruption, which is the universal taint of our fallen nature? If these men have sinned, who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin *? Who can deny that the heart of man is full of evil? Who can be insensible of the law which is in his members, warring against the law which is in his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin †? Who can know these things and not feel his danger? Beloved, if we would be safe with regard to the innocence of our lives and our eternal state, we are most deeply concerned to act always upon this conviction: that there is no good thing whatever, in thought, word, or deed, which we, without the grace of God to prompt the mind and to strengthen the purpose, are capable of performing; nor any horrible guilt, which, unless the same grace restrain and preserve us, we are not liable to incur.

But this, in the transaction before us, appears to have been little in the thoughts of this apostle. All the salutary counsels of his Master, relating to the frailty of his nature, appear to have been borne down

* Prov. xx. 9.

† Rom. vii. 23.

by an excessive confidence in himself. We have thus noticed the first step to his disaster: it was the error of his *mind* in forgetting the need of divine grace.

II. We have now to remark the second, which was an error of his *conduct*. This was the offspring of the former, and contributed, in a subordinate measure, to precipitate his downfall.

To those who feel not the want of divine grace it is perfectly natural, that they should neglect the means of obtaining it. Such, as will appear from the sequel of the narrative, was the conduct of Peter.

Our blessed Lord retires into the garden, which was to be the scene of his inexpressible agony. He takes with him Peter, James, and John. And now his soul began to be sorrowful and very heavy. He gives them a charge, Tarry ye here, and watch with me *. Having said this, he retires to a little distance; passes a short time in deep anguish and fervent prayer: and then returns to his disciples. In what employment now does he find the apostle? We are to take notice of the peculiar circumstances of the case. Peter had at this moment to maintain

* Matt. xxvi. 36—45.

a painful struggle, first, with the weakness and importunity of his own flesh: secondly, with the malice and cruelty of his enemies, who were bent upon the destruction of his Master, and from whom himself had much ground for apprehension: and lastly, with Satan, who had desired to have him, that he might sift him like wheat*. What then was the state in which, at this perilous time, our Lord found him? He was asleep. He now receives from his Master a benign reproof. He is reminded of his danger; he is reminded of the weakness of the flesh; he is admonished in these words: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation†." Such, however, was his presumption, that he gave little heed to the counsel: for our Lord again retires, again returns, and again finds him asleep. A third time he does after the same manner, and a third time he finds him asleep‡.

We have thus seen what was the first and leading cause of this apostle's crime: it was a vain presumption of his own virtue. We have also seen the consequent error of his conduct: he neglected the means of grace; he neglected watchfulness and prayer. We have now to mark the issue.

* Luke xxii. 31.

† Matt. xxvi. 41.

‡ Luke xxii. 45.

Alas ! never was the boast of virtue more signally put to shame, nor the pretension of courage more completely disgraced ! When, indeed, Jesus was seized by the officers of the chief priests, we find Peter drawing his sword to defend his master's life against a vast multitude of armed men *. This looks like the act of an undaunted spirit : for, on all grounds of ordinary calculation, resistance must in such a case have been hopeless, and certain destruction the result of his proceeding. Here was not, however, the courage of a man determined to maintain his duty at all hazards, but the false courage of him who rushes to an encounter in which he is assured of victory †. For Peter well knew that his master was the Son of God : he had declared his persuasion of it ‡ : God had revealed it to him § ; and the whole tenor of his conduct evinces, that this conviction had not now abandoned him. We might also expect to find him prepared for the ignominious sufferings which Jesus was about to undergo ; for Jesus had repeatedly declared to him ||, in

* Matt. xxvi. 51 ; John xviii. 10.

† Aristotle has specified this among the distinctions between true and false courage.—Eth. ad Nic. l. 3, c. 8.

‡ Matt. xvi. 16.

§ Ibid. 17.

|| Ibid. xvi. 21 ; xvii. 22, 23 ; xx. 18, 19.

the very plainest expressions, the approach of that dreadful hour which had now come. But with regard to such predictions, he had discovered the common backwardness of men in the apprehension of truths which they like not to receive *. He still anticipated the time when his master was to restore the kingdom to Israel †; that is, when the Messiah would reveal himself in the splendour of a mighty prince and conqueror, subduing all his enemies with an invincible arm: and there can be little doubt, that he also expected honours and affluence to be largely bestowed by Jesus on the faithful adherents of his humble condition. See him however in the palace of the high priest, when Jesus was in the hands of wicked men, surrounded, like a malefactor, with the terrors of human justice. Here was an unexpected scene: one of the surest criterions, as hath been justly remarked ‡, of real courage. What now is his conduct? No longer able to reconcile with present appearances the hope to which he had been accustomed to cling, he is

* Matt. xvi. 22; Luke xviii. 34.

† Acts i. 6.

‡ *Ἀνδρειοτάρον το ἐν τοῖς αἰφνιδίοις φόβοις ἀφοβὸν καὶ ἀταραχὸν εἶναι, ἢ ἐν τοῖς προδηλοῖς.* "To be unmoved in sudden alarms is a surer proof of courage than to be affected in the same way in those dangers which are foreseen."—Arist. ut supra.

amazed, confounded, and bewildered. He retains no government of his words: all the powers of his soul are palsied with fear. In the first instance, that intrepid constancy *, which neither temptation could seduce nor danger appal, and which not even death could shake; is discomfited and put to flight by a few words from the mouth of a woman: (for it was a woman to whom he first denied his Lord.) But his virtue has time to rally. A second time he is charged, and again by a woman, with being the disciple of Jesus. A second time his resolution is put to flight: again he denies his Lord. And now he adds perjury to his former crime; for he denied him with an oath. But a third trial awaits him. Once more he is charged with being a disciple of Jesus. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. Now at last he remembered himself, and he remembered the words of Jesus. The Lord turned and looked upon Peter †. What must have been the anguish of that man's soul, when he met the eye of Jesus! May we never learn it from the sting of remorse.

Here then we have an awful warning to take

* Matt. xxvi. 69—75.

† Luke xxii. 61.

heed to ourselves. Let us not imagine, that ~~we~~ are exempt from that weakness which we discover in this glorious saint, or secure from the danger under which *he* fell. Our safety from evil will be best promoted, not by our confidence, but by our fears and our distrustfulness of ourselves.

Scarcely ever was there a case of monstrous and malignant wickedness, from which an enforcement of this admonition may not be derived. There was a time when the perpetrators of such crimes thought themselves wholly incapable of the guilt which they afterwards incurred. Such was the feeling of Hazael, when the prophet brought out to his view the fruit of that wickedness which lay concealed in his heart; concealed even from himself. "Is thy servant a dog," said he, "that he should do this great thing*?" How then came it to pass, that they actually did commit the very sins, of which once they could not think without abhorrence? Most probably, for this very reason, because they conceived themselves incapable of them.

This is a very fatal mistake: for the very worst imaginable crimes are spoken of in Scripture as the works of the flesh, and are therein traced to the

* 2 Kings viii. 13.

operation of that evil principle, with which every man was born into the world; which every man carries about him; and against which every man must fight as long as this life shall last. For this warfare can be accomplished only at the point of death, and the trophy of it can be raised only in the paradise of God.

It is only by God's grace that we can stand. No man presuming on his own virtue was ever able to maintain his innocence. He that shall venture his confidence on such a perilous support, will have occasion to learn, from the painful issue of his presumption, the truth of that saying of Solomon:—"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool *."

Call to mind, in the case before you, the very few hours which intervened between the confidence of virtue and the tears of deep contrition. Are not ~~we~~ liable to the same failure? Who can tell that his own lapse will not be equally sudden and disastrous? Who can calculate the mischief which a moment's inattention may bring upon his soul? If a panic sufficed to overthrow the fidelity of Peter, we may in like manner be overpowered by an occa-

* Prov. xxviii. 26.

sion of anger, a puff of praise, a sudden prosperity, a surfeit of intemperance, and a thousand unforeseen causes, for which none but the vigilant can be prepared. Who knows what great temptations, what painful conflicts, may await him? Who knows that they will not, in the very next hour, burst with a dreadful shock upon his soul? Are we then prepared for every thing that may occur?

The danger of security ought to be particularly weighed by those, who, while they regard with just repugnance every glaring crime, are little troubled at the thought of lesser sins. Who can say, Thus far will I sin and no further? He who does, indulges a most dangerous reliance on himself. Beloved, while we maintain the proper innocence of our baptismal character, then are we free; for we have been taught, that if Christ shall make us free, we are free indeed*. But if we draw back and commit sin, what is our state then? Plainly no other than that which is set forth to us in those words: "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin†." And we are, according to the proper import of these words, to remember, that a servant has not a will of his own, but is swayed by the do-

* John viii. 36.

† Ibid. 34.

mination of his master. The peculiar danger of lesser sins consists in their beguiling influence. They do not frighten and alarm a man's conscience, but, like Delilah, lay him asleep, and then cause his strength to depart from him.

We see then how much we are concerned to cast away all carnal security and self-reliance. The weapons of our warfare must be spiritual : we must put on the armour of God.

While we thus feel the necessity of Divine grace, we must also take special heed, that we neglect not the appointed *means* of it. " Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." It was the disregard of this counsel that caused the fall of St. Peter : and this same Apostle has himself delivered, for our instruction and guidance, the very precept to the neglect of which his own deplorable sin is to be ascribed :—" Watch unto prayer *." We see then the urgent need of watchfulness and prayer.

I. We must watch continually : for we lie in the midst of dangers, and know not how soon temptation, sudden as a thief in the night, and strong as an armed man, may break in upon us. And let us remember, that if we exercise this watchfulness

* 1 Pet. iv. 7.

aright, there are two things to which we shall be most anxiously attentive: the will of God, and the state of our own lives. So may we be enabled to bring our practice more and more to a conformity with the requirements of our Maker and Judge. These two things are, in other words, the Study of the Scriptures and Self-examination. With the omission of either of these, it is quite impossible that we should be safe: it is impossible that our temper and our actions should be such as God has willed and commanded that they should be: it is impossible that we should fulfil the conditions which must qualify us for his merciful regard and favour. For it is in religion as it is in the manual labours of art: every good workman must have his eye both to the work that he *does*, and to the rule which he is to work *by*. To these two things I must add a third. Blessed be God, the revelation which he has given us, conveys not only a perfect rule, but a perfect example: and according to that pattern, we are enjoined to frame our own demeanour. You see then how needful it is, that to the study of God's word, and the examination of our own lives, we should add, the Imitation of our blessed Lord: it is thus we must labour that the same mind be in us, which was also in Christ Jesus;

and that as he who hath called us is holy, so we also may be holy in all manner of conversation.

II. We must also pray continually. It is not without manifest reason we are taught, that we ought always to pray and not to faint; to pray without ceasing; and to continue instant * in prayer †. If we consider, that all the motions of a divine life, those motions which must needs quicken us in our path to heaven, spring not from ourselves, but from the Divine Comforter, who renovates and sanctifies the regenerate; that all-protecting grace issues from the dispensation of the same blessed Spirit; that without his heavenly succours all our life is death, and all our spiritual state is full of danger and devoid of comfort; that prayer is the prescribed means of obtaining these succours: if we believe these things, is it not madness to neglect our prayers! Is there any time when our souls are safe from attack? when the spiritual life can be sustained without the refreshments of grace? when we can fulfil our duty by our own strength, or repel our spiritual enemies by the prowess of our fleshly arm? If such a time there be, we may safely neglect our

* Or, *steadfast*.

† Luke xviii. 1.; 1 Thess. v. 17.; Rom. xii. 12.

prayers: but if not, we must needs be content to seek of God that support which is to keep us from perishing: and, as we are bound to beg of him from day to day our daily bread, so must we also be content to beg, with fervour and with frequency, that meat which endureth to everlasting life.

The force of this representation might, in some instances, be strengthened, by appealing to the knowledge of individuals respecting the past and present state of their own minds: though it is painful to think there are so many, to whom such an address will not apply, because they know not the effect of those duties which I am now anxious to inculcate. Can you fix upon a time when you were sedulously attentive to all the public and private offices of Christian piety, to the participation of the Lord's Supper, to secret prayer, to the careful inspection of your own life, to intense meditation on the word of God, and on the example of Christ? Did you not, at such a time, find it comparatively easy to quench the unholy fires of lust, to stifle the purposes of wrath, to restrain the power of sin, and to subdue the rebellion of the heart against God? And have you not, when these offices were neglected or carelessly performed, found the very reverse to be the state of your soul, and that your passions

were like a raging sea, whose turbulence you had not power to allay? If this appeal suit your case, then your own knowledge of yourself will carry with it a power of persuasion more cogent than any general representations of mine can supply. But if the course of life thus described should be unknown to you, then I would say: While you seek to conquer your lusts and to establish the peace of your mind, you neglect those very means with which only the hope of success can reasonably be connected; you neglect those means of which the efficacy was never, by any who duly employed them, found wanting.

After these remarks relating to the duties of watchfulness and prayer, and to the means of grace; I am to observe, that there is one of those means to which, by reason of the solemn occasion on which we are here assembled, our attention is more especially due. The blessed ordinance of the Lord's Supper was given for the purpose of maintaining the spiritual life in our hearts. They who neglect it evince too plainly, that they feel neither the danger of their spiritual state, nor the want of divine grace. They, like Peter, are fast asleep in the midst of danger: if, indeed, their neglect may not more justly be compared to that other part of his con-

duct, when he spoke those words of horror, “ I know not the man.” For how can they be willing to *know* him, when their very act declares, that they will not *remember* him? What else than this can be understood by their refusal of that token, which their Lord specially appointed for the remembrance of himself? “ This do,” said he, “ in remembrance of me *.” Consider, I pray you, the awful danger of neglecting this ordinance. Christ came from the bosom of God to procure our salvation. Would he then, think you, have appointed this ordinance as an indifferent and optional ceremony, which men might observe or not, according to their humour? Would he have ordained it, if it had not been essentially connected with the purpose of his mission? Will the redeeming mercies of his covenant be extended to any but those who obey him? Does he not teach you the strength and refreshment which it gives to the soul, when he teaches you to regard it as the means of vital union with himself? “ he that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him †.” Has he not instructed you, that this union is absolutely necessary towards maintaining the spiritual life :

* Luke xxii. 19 ; 1 Cor. xi. 24.

† John vi. 56.

‘ Abide in me,’ says he, “ and I in you: As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me *.” Do we not also learn from Him, that we must, without that sustaining grace which God has annexed to this holy mystery, be dead to all present experience of the Divine life, and void of hope with regard to its future consummation? “ Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood ye have no life in you †.” Consider these things, and reflect whether you have done all that in you lies for the safety of your soul, while thus, by your own act and deed, you wilfully cut yourself off from the appointed means of communication with the Divine love and favour. Consider, you who neglect this ordinance, consider what I have said, in its particular and personal application to the state of your minds and of your lives. Are you now labouring under any habitual sins from which you have not strength to break free? Do you suffer under a painful sense of danger, and an anxious looking forward to what must be hereafter? as men fearful to repent, and yet full of dismay at the thought of dying impenitent? If then you have duly

* John xv. 4.

† John vi. 53.

weighed those representations of Scripture which relate to the necessity of this holy ordinance, put the question each of you to himself, whether the sinfulness and misery of your life may not sufficiently be explained by this one neglect of duty. For it is plain, that the vital connexion between God and your own souls is not maintained, and that all the evils you now suffer are the least which, if you believe the truth of those representations, you could expect.

Reflect once more on that affecting example to which your thoughts have now been directed. The best man living knows not to-day, how bad he may be to-morrow. His sufficiency is of God, and therefore his confidence will be in God, not in himself: but that confidence he cannot warrantably indulge, while he neglects the means of grace which God has provided.

Suffer not your minds to be soothed into repose by witnessing the numbers who sin after the same manner as yourselves: a single case of this sort would, if we viewed the matter aright, be sufficiently deplorable, and the multitude of them indicates only a most alarming prevalence of irreligion and lukewarmness. It is not the way of the many, but that of the few, in which you are taught to hope for

safety *. Nor lull yourselves into security under the shelter of those excuses, which men are so prone to advance for the vindication of their neglect. Such excuses cannot now be fully entered into: but I will only say respecting them, that if, under such a transgression of duty, they render you contented with yourselves, they speak peace where there is no peace, and that, however they may satisfy you, they will not at the last judgment satisfy Him to whom you must give account.

To that account it deeply concerns us, that we should in this and all other things have a devout regard. We are to bear in mind, that all our neglects of duty will, in the proceedings of that day, derive the greatest aggravation from benefits unthankfully received, and advantages unimproved: for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required †. Respecting such benefits the festival of this day brings with it an impressive admonition ‡. The manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles is a dispensation, which we cannot duly commemorate without the memory of unspeakable mercies to ourselves §. Let us remember that we

* Matt. vii. 13, 14.

† Luke xii. 48.

‡ The Epiphany.

§ Eph. ii. 11, 12, 13.

were once aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope, without God in the world: but that now, by the blood of Christ, we that were afar off, are made nigh unto God, fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. If you would not renounce these privileges, consider again, I entreat you, the danger of neglecting sacramental ordinances: for these ordinances are the pledges of our adoption and of our hope, and the bonds of our communion with Christ and with the blessed company of all faithful people. May God so assist us with his grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as he hath prepared for us to walk in, through Jesus Christ our Lord: to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end.

SERMON II.

THE DANGER OF AN UNFRUITFUL HEARING OF
THE WORD OF GOD: ILLUSTRATED IN THE
FALL OF JUDAS ISCARIOT.

ACTS i. 25.

This ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

THESE last words, *that he might go to his own place*, have commonly been understood to intimate the final doom of everlasting perdition. If such be their import, they present us with a case which has, I believe, no parallel in Scripture: for I am not aware of any other man, respecting whom we are, in God's word, assured, that his destiny is fixed to this unspeakably wretched and irretrievable condition. But be this as it may, (for the words have been variously interpreted) the case of Judas Isca-

riot is, on the lowest supposition, inexpressibly awful and affecting. He died by his own hand, he left this world in despair and distraction. His manner of death has been marked by circumstances of astonishment and horror. He committed a black and horrible crime, and took the reward of his iniquity. But he felt no enjoyment of the fruit of his wickedness; for, after he had obtained it, he was frightened to utter dismay by the terrors of his conscience, so that he desired strangling rather than life. Having purchased his field with the price of his master's blood, he went and hanged himself, and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out! Who can be unaffected when he thinks of such a death? Let us be affected by it to our own edification. *With a view to this benefit, I will claim your attention to certain particulars relating to the life and character of this wretched man: for these are adapted to throw light upon the subject of his death, and to enforce the warning which it utters.*

We have seen what was the end of all his wickedness: it will be useful to enquire what was the beginning of it?

But observe here, I mean, what was the beginning of that *peculiar* wickedness which brought him to his death? for, as to the beginning of sin in general, he, like ourselves, brought that into the world with him: it was a part of that defilement with which nature has infected us all.

Let us regard the question, then, in this limited sense. What was the beginning of that peculiar wickedness, which brought Judas to his frightful end? I would answer thus: He heard the preaching of God's word, but profited not by it. This I regard as the first step in his progress to destruction. Thus far, at least, we are quite certain: had he laid to heart and obeyed the word which had been preached to him, he would not have fallen in the way that he did.

In order to convince you of this truth, I will, in the first place, claim your attention to certain passages of Scripture.

“Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth *.” “What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange

* Luke xii. 15.

for his soul? *” “ Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal †.”

To this effect our blessed Lord has delivered to us his divine precepts against covetousness. Such precepts were well known to Judas: there can be no doubt, that many such precepts had fallen from our Lord's lips while Judas was present. But it is well known that, notwithstanding such admonitions, notwithstanding a multitude of similar warnings against the love of the world, Judas retained the evil propensity of his heart: for he was to the end a covetous man.

Such was his evil disposition: it was covetousness. But to this I do not attribute his fall. For evil dispositions we all have; they come to us by nature; but these, of whatever kind they be, the word of God, in those who duly receive it, is able to subdue. With the knowledge of this word, Judas was blessed: he heard it from the mouth of the Son of God: but he laid it not to heart, he yielded not obedience

* Matt. xvi 26.

† Ibid. vi. 19.

to it. Had he received that word in an honest and good heart, the root of bitterness which nature had planted in his soul would have been torn away.

Observe, I pray you, the particular character of this crime, as it appeared in Judas: I mean, the crime of disregarding the ministration of the Divine word. There are those, who never hear the word of God without contempt. Such are atheists and infidels: we need not now enlarge on *their* guilt, it is unspeakably horrid: and to such men, while they continue so, there can be no hope; for if our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost*. But that was not the case with Judas. With regard to the authority of his master, he was no infidel: he knew that Jesus spoke by the authority of God. His sin consisted in this: He disobeyed the authority which he acknowledged. Let this be attentively remarked, for it ought to come home to our own bosoms. Is not this our case, when we hear the word of God unprofitably? when we hear it, and deliberately sin against it? how comes this

* 2 Cor. iv. 3. The proper sense of the passage I conceive to be, *It is hid to them only that are lost.* The idiom of the Greek language frequently demands a similar construction. Parallel examples are common both in Scripture and in profane writers. At Rom. iv. 9. our translators have themselves supplied the word *only*.

to pass? We are, it is to be hoped, no infidels: we do not deny the authority of the word. No; we acknowledge the authority and resist it. If you would understand the danger of such conduct, look to the case of Judas; and follow me, I entreat you, with close attention, while I point out to you the successive steps by which, from this sin, he gradually went on to the horrible consummation of his wickedness. This it shall now be my attempt to do.

Covetousness was the evil desire of his heart. Evil desires break out into evil actions. Thus it is represented by St. James: "Lust when it hath conceived bringeth forth sin *." It is, I say, the natural tendency of evil desires to break out into evil deeds. A covetous man is near to becoming a dishonest man; this will naturally follow, if the grace of God do not suppress the evil desire: but the blessed influences of divine grace are little to be expected by that man, who does not reverence and obey the Divine word. It will therefore be easy to account for what I am about to say. We have it upon record that Judas was not only covetous, but also addicted to dishonest gains.

But theft was not the only wickedness by which he sought to gratify his love of gain. He was like-

* James i. 15.

wise a hypocrite ; and this sin was, in him, of such deep malignity, that he was capable of pretending the best motives and principles, at the very moment when he was bent upon the worst actions. His master was so poor that he had not where to lay his head, and his apostles partook in general of the severe hardships of our Lord's afflicted state. From this master, from these his faithful companions, and out of their small pittance ; this wretched man was in the habit of stealing for his own use : and, while intent upon this crime, he was, in order to get the money in his grasp, capable of pretending a charitable desire to relieve the poor. So it appears from the narrative of St. John *. While our Lord was at Bethany, Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard, and anointed the feet of Jesus. On this occasion, what was the remark of the traitor ? Why, said he, was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor ? Observe now, how the evangelist explains this conduct ; " This he said, not that he cared for the poor ; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." This act was a natural prelude to that by which he betrayed his master with a kiss. For he was now pretending a warm

* Chap. xii. 1—6.

affection of kindness and charity, while he was bent upon the designs of a thief; wearing a mask of benevolence to the poor, while his heart was set upon robbing the poorest of the poor: for such were his Divine master and the companions of his apostleship.

Judas, it appears, was entrusted with the care of the money, which formed the common stock of our Lord and his apostles. It is not improbable, that he may have sought this office for the very purpose of being dishonest: it is, at least, certain, that he made that use of it. How then came it to pass, that our Lord, who knew what was in man, suffered him to have it? The question is natural, and it is soon answered. We are to observe, that God tempteth no man*: God neither solicits nor induces any man to sin: Judas, therefore, was not selected as a treasurer, in order that he might become a thief. But we are also to observe, that when God sees wickedness in the heart of man, he does, upon occasion, suffer that wickedness to work, in an instrumental way, towards good and merciful purposes which he may have in view. The death of our blessed Lord was the redemption of the world: the covetousness and treachery of

* James i. 13.

Judas, the cruelty and malice of blood-thirsty Jews, were human means, which God permitted to work for the consummation of that awful appointment.

We have now viewed the wickedness of Iscariot up to a certain point. We have seen that he was avaricious, and dishonest, and unfaithful; that he was hard-hearted, and a cruel robber of the poor; that he was a man of such dark and malignant hypocrisy, as to be capable of covering, with pretences of charity and goodness, a purpose of atrocious villainy. These points of character had already disclosed themselves in the incidents of his life. It was now and not till now; it was not, I say, till he had already reached this pitch of depravity, that he first harboured the thought of selling his master: when he did admit that thought, it was the devil that put it into his heart *. Ponder these things with deep consideration. Treachery, and the selling of innocent blood: crimes like these are not the sins by which a man first departs from innocence; they are the crimes of one who, after violating the restraints of duty in minor instances, has gone on from less to greater wickedness, and become gradually more and more hardened by fami-

* John xiii. 2.

liarity with guilt. When the devil now entered into Judas (as we learn that he did *), he found a soul prepared for the abode of an unclean spirit: for the previous wickedness of the man was such, that his conscience must now have been seared with a hot iron. Profit, I entreat you, by this example. If you be entangled in any habitual or wilful sin, break it off without delay: escape for your life, lest you be consumed. By the practice of sin, the conscience grows every day less tender, the judgment less alive to the difference between right and wrong, less sensible of spiritual danger: and thus the soul becomes insensibly prepared for the worst of crimes. Bethink yourself before this delusion becomes incurable: for it is an ordinary judgment of God to give up to a strong delusion those, who persist in their transgressions. Bethink yourself, I say, before it is too late: for there can be little hope of a man, whose eyes are now blinded by the god of this world, and who is led captive by the evil one. Judas was now bent on profit to himself, he fancied himself in the way to obtain it: meanwhile, he was in reality the tool of an evil spirit, who was drawing him on to the pit of hell; and the very means which

* John xiii. 27.

he employed for the gain of riches, were the occasion of bringing him to an accursed death. Such is the craft and cunning of worldly men! Such was the case of Judas! We can hardly doubt that he was now fallen into a state of final impenitence, and thus prepared for the greatest of his crimes.

His manner of proceeding in this horrid deed are thus described by the evangelist:—"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him*." Thus St. Matthew relates the bargain. The opportunity and the deed of treachery are thus described, as taking place at the close of our blessed Lord's agonizing meditation in the garden of Gethsemane. "While he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and

* Matt. xxvi. 14-16.

kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him *."

We have now seen the treachery of this man: let us go on to the end of his story. What profit had he of his wicked deed? He lost no time in disposing of his money to a purpose, which (if we may judge from the extreme rapidity of his proceeding), most probably had great influence in prompting his enormous crime. With the reward of his iniquity he purchased a field. But alas! short was the possession of his gains: for within a few hours the wrath of an implacable conscience, and the heavy retribution of God, came upon him.

Jesus, thus betrayed, is quickly apprehended, dragged before the high priest, interrogated, accused by false witnesses, and sentenced to die as a blasphemer. Let us now take the conduct of Judas from the words of the evangelist: premising only (with a view to the explanation of the sacred narrative), that Judas does not appear to have at this time paid for his field; or, if he had paid for it, it seems that he had obtained elsewhere, a sum equal to that for which he had sold his master, and which

* Matt. xxvi. 47—50.

he had given for his field. "Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself*." What a change is here! How may we suppose this man to have longed for his pieces of silver! How much enjoyment, may we imagine, did he promise his heart in the possession of his field! He has got his pieces of silver, he has made his bargain for his field: and now, behold him, cursed by God and abhorred by man, flying to a halter for relief from his own thoughts! Beloved, let us take warning. Whatever object we pursue by wicked means will, after it has been obtained, appear in colours far different from those which it previously wore. Temptation sees a thing in one light; but the memory of guilt and the fear of judgment see it in another. Before the crime is committed, it wears, perhaps, the aspect of inestimable profit or of transporting delight: but

* Matt. xxvii, 3—5.

afterwards come reflection and remorse, the advantage dwindles into nothing, and the soul is overwhelmed with confusion. What profit, may we then think, had we in that of which we now are ashamed?

The love of money reigned in the soul of Iscariot. In order to obtain money he was a thief, a hypocrite, and a traitor. He did obtain it, and then, in the utmost horror of distraction and remorse, went and put an end to his life.

But why did he thus act on finding that our Lord was condemned? Was not this the purpose of the chief priests and elders, when they covenanted with the traitor and bought him? Yes. Was not this their purpose well known to Judas? Of this also there can, I think, be little doubt. But it seems extremely improbable that the condemnation and death of our Lord were contemplated by Judas as the issue of his proceeding: for the style of the narrative appears to intimate, that he was struck with surprise as well as with horror, when this result burst upon his view.

The most probable account of this matter seems to me to be the following. You may recollect, from what I stated in my late discourse on the fall of St. Peter, that at this time none of the apostles

expected that our Lord would suffer an ignominious death. He had indeed plainly foretold that event: but it commonly happens, that men will not believe nor understand the plainest things, if they do not like them: so it is with mankind in general, and so it had been with the apostles. They were still dreaming of a mighty king, whose kingdom was to be of this world, and who was to bestow honours and riches upon his followers. Such was their notion of a Messiah: they knew that their master *was* the Messiah; and Judas was as well acquainted as any of them, with the proof of his Divine authority. He had not yet indeed, assumed the title and the functions of a king: but they fully expected that he would do it one day or other. For the coming of that day, there can be little doubt that Judas was impatient: for it is probable that he chiefly valued his connexion with his master, as the imaginary source of immense riches to himself.

Under this feeling of impatience, he seems to have been desirous of putting the matter to a speedy issue. We may suppose him then to have imagined, that if he put his master into the hands of the Jews, Jesus would then be compelled to display the power and terror of a conqueror: (for that character entered into the Jewish notion of a

Messiah): that he would crush his enemies, ride triumphant over their necks, and restore the kingdom to Israel: and that then would come the long-wished day of riches and promotion. He knew indeed, that he was going to commit an act of infidelity: but he knew also the great forgiveness of his Master: and while that act enabled him to secure a sum of money for himself, he might think that, as it would lead to such a desirable result, there could be no harm in it; that he himself in the first place would get his field, and that his master, instead of being a miserably poor man, would soon become a mighty king.

If this were the case, it may teach us a valuable lesson. We know it is common for men to violate their plain duty, under the pretence *that no harm can come of it*. Such is *their* notion on viewing the consequences which *they* think may flow from their actions. But they should consider this: While they do their duty, they may leave the consequences to God; while they do wrong, they are bound to answer for the consequences themselves: and, be the consequences what they may, this evil at least they incur, namely—the displeasure of God, who has no where authorized them to do evil that good may come. Judas probably thought that his

treachery would be harmless in its effect: but he found himself, in the issue, tormented with the remorse of a murderer and infuriated with the rage of a suicide. Beware then, all you who are at any time tempted to do wrong under the notion that there is no harm in it: beware especially, you who are young: for it is by this pretence that young people are commonly drawn first into little sins, and then, from less to greater, till they go on to fill up their utmost measure of guilt and misery. Beware of it, I pray you, for it is a dangerous deceit. Do you think there is no harm in it? What! no harm in provoking God! in provoking him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell! Let no man deceive you with vain words.

Judas went and hanged himself. He put an end to his life in utter despair. If ever remorse could goad a wicked man to self-destruction, the shocking crime of Judas might naturally lead to this result. But it is not unreasonable to ask—Why should Judas cast off all hope of mercy? His master was a great pattern of forgiveness and love. Forgiveness of sins was the very essence of his evangelical doctrine. Judas knew the precepts of his Lord; he knew his forgiving character. His crime, great as it was, was not in its own nature

unpardonable. Jesus forgave Peter who denied him : he forgave, and prayed God to forgive, the Jews who murdered him : and Judas himself might have been forgiven if he had repented. Yes, truly : even he might have been forgiven, *if he had repented*. But then, repentance is a gift and a grace of God ; it cometh down from above ; and there is a point beyond which God will not vouchsafe his grace ; for his Holy Spirit will not always strive with bad men. Judas was now overwhelmed with sorrow : but it was not that godly sorrow that worketh repentance *.

I need not enlarge on the extreme wretchedness of such a condition : it is a prelude to a wretched eternity ; of which latter, no words can express the horror or describe the suffering. That such a state is possible, and that all wicked men are liable, and even likely, to fall into it ; is plain from the testimony and illustration of Scripture. It is the appointment of God : nor does it, though awful to reflect on, afford the slightest ground for impugning his mercy. For God is full of long-suffering and forbearance towards the sons of men : he willeth not the death of a sinner : it is in the exercise of

* 2 Cor. vii. 10.

this benign regard to men, it is in order to stay the ruin of the impenitent, that he administers reproofs, admonitions, visitations, and corrections. If these methods work not their due effect; if the man continue obstinate and irreclaimable; of what avail would be the farther continuance of Divine grace? God, no doubt, might break the will of that man, as he breaks the trees of the forest: he might by force constrain him to obedience: but then the very essence and nature of the man would be so changed, that he would no longer be a proper object of God's reward and favour, any more than any lifeless creature which is wrought upon by mere outward strength and force. As to other methods of reformation (methods, I mean, suitable to the condition of a reasonable being), to them he has proved himself wholly callous and insensible. It is plain then, that the continuance of Divine grace to one, who thus obstinately and despitefully resists it; to one who, God foresees, always will resist it: could answer no purpose of Divine mercy. For it would be followed by an aggravation of guilt, and would thus contribute to enhance the severity of a righteous condemnation.

Let us, in conclusion, return to the case of Judas. The foregoing review of character presents many

deeply affecting lessons. It displays the deadly influence of covetousness: for this is seen in the example of a man who, from his own experience, found that the love of money is the root of all evil, that it pierces men through with many sorrows, and drowns them in destruction and perdition *. It shews the hateful character of hypocrisy, as the symptom of a mind far gone in depravity; for what else can be the state of that man, who sins with the principles of rectitude full before his eyes? as he must needs do, who deliberately employs them for a cloak to his wickedness. It furnishes an apt occasion of guarding men against the delusion of sin, and of teaching them (what manifestly appears in the life of Judas), that all prospect of advantage to be gained by sin is, in reality, a dangerous delusion. So it must be indeed, if the world be governed by a righteous God; for he will suffer no man to profit by transgression. And the wicked man, while he thinks that he is serving his own interest, is, in fact, serving the purpose of an evil spirit, who was a murderer from the beginning, and who employs his services to ensure his destruction. It affords matter for enlarging upon the guilt of un-

* 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

faithfulness ; upon the danger connected with the beginnings of evil ; and upon the natural tendency of a corrupt soul to go on in a gradual increase of its corruption. But among all the various improvement which the subject affords, there is one point which I most anxiously desire to enforce. Look then to the life and death of Iscariot. This man was chosen out of the world to be the disciple and companion of Jesus. Blessed was his lot : yea, beyond all the kings and prophets and righteous men who had lived before him ! Had he maintained his fidelity, nothing could have separated him from the unspeakable love and reward of his master : he might have trampled upon death and hell, and the gate of paradise would have been open to him. The miracles of his Lord were the warrant of his faith : the doctrine of his Lord was the security of his hope : he had seen the one, he had heard the other. Nevertheless, the last state of this man was worse than the first, and it had been better for him that he had never been born. To what may this be ascribed ? To the neglect of profiting by the ministry of God's word ; to the neglect of framing his life agreeably to the doctrine which had been preached to him. Let the warning of his example

speak to you in the words of Christ:—"Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he thinketh that he hath*."

* Luke viii. 18.

SERMON III.

ON THE NECESSITY OF AN EARLY PIETY.

ECCLES. xii. 1.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

THE delay of conversion is a thing of such manifest danger and alarm, that it can hardly be thought to call for fresh instruction or new remark. No man wants to be taught, that this is a serious matter : it will be enough if he can be brought to think upon it and to attend to his own thoughts. There are however many things which operate to drive such thoughts away. Our lives are full of distraction from pleasure and from care. We know, indeed, that our stay in this world cannot be very long ; yet we flatter ourselves, that it is not immediately drawing to a close ; and nature inclines us to prefer mirth to seriousness. The world presents many things to engage the fancy, many to beguile the understand-

ing; and it is the common folly of mankind, to make the more weighty matters of life give way to the less. It is therefore most needful to counteract the mischief which thus arises, and to call back men's minds to a point from which they are so apt to wander. Nor will the effort be useless, (though it may be humble,) if we seek to do this, not so much in the way of teaching them any thing new, as of reminding them of what they already know.

To such a purpose, few occasions can be more suitable than the present. The long-suffering of God, (which is designed to lead men to repentance,) hath permitted us to see the beginning of another year: the last year has carried away to their account many of our neighbours: it has shortened our own day of trial: our allotted time may be cut off, suddenly and instantaneously, and we know not how soon: our eternal joy or grief will be the issue of our present conduct. Such are the reflections which obviously apply to this season.

This, I say, is a fit time to put men on their guard against the horrible delusion of thinking that they may safely delay their repentance. To this end let us attend to the royal preacher: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh,

when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." The health and vigour of life are the proper season for the service of God; therefore, put not off this service to a time, when all your powers will be enfeebled and wasted by infirmity and age; be wise to the purpose of salvation, before sickness and the decay of life come upon you. Consider, I pray you, beloved, the general incompatibility of sickness and of a death bed, with those devout acts and habits which are to prepare a soul for meeting God. It is with a chief regard to this particular point, that I now wish to display to you the danger of delaying repentance.

Who then is there among you, that has not had experience of sickness? I entreat you to profit by it. The conversion of the heart to God is a work, which calls for a calm and collected mind; for composure and sobriety of thought; for an understanding able, coolly and dispassionately, to look both backward and forward, to estimate rightly its relations to God, its duties and its prospects. Did you ever find a time of bodily infirmity suitable to these things? Did you not rather find, that any indisposition, though it were trifling, (such as a cold, a head-ache, or a slight fever) was enough to disqualify you for such occupations? Was it not

enough to make you averse to them? Every body knows that, in this state of health, people commonly feel themselves incapable of profitable attention to any serious business whatever. So it is, the mind is unhinged through the disorder of the body; and any degree of thoughtful attention is, in severe attacks of illness, not only oppressive to the spirits, but calculated also to aggravate the malady. The sick person may feel strong pangs of remorse; he may cast up his eyes to God with deep contrition and vehement entreaty: but ordinarily speaking, he can do little or nothing in the way of a reasonable service. More or less of this, is apt to be felt on every attack of sickness. It is a time not favourable to consideration; and yet consideration is absolutely necessary to that change of heart and of life, which the Gospel demands. If such be the case of sickness in general, what shall we say of those overpowering maladies and sharp agonies, which commonly go before the dissolution of life! When a man is unfit to think of *any* thing, shall he then, to any good purpose, think of heaven and hell, of repentance and holiness, and reconciliation with God? When he is unfit to converse with man, or to bear the presence of a stranger; shall he then, for the first time, hold an acceptable com-

munion with God? When he is unable to transact worldly business, and unfit to be trusted with any slight matter of worldly interest; shall he then take part in that mighty concern between God and himself, on which depends the interest of everlasting ages? Shall he do all this while he lies upon his bed, stupid with lethargy or frantic with maddening convulsions? Shall he do this, when, perhaps, he has sank into the state of an idiot; when his memory is lost; when his thoughts are wandering in wild disorder; when he cannot speak a single word, nor do a single act, like a reasonable man? What a delusion is here! Alas, brethren, sickness and old age are seasons, when the soul feels the utmost need of all that comfort, which it may have acquired by previous habits of religious duty; it wants a store *already* provided by continual devotion and supplies of grace; it wants, I say, *such* a store for the support of patience and of faith under their extreme and urgent trial *. To seek

* The following declaration, coming from the death-bed of an eminently good man, will give to this representation the additional weight of a most affecting experience. "*I must leave my soul,*" said the great lord Lyttelton in his last sickness, "*in the same state it was in before this illness: I find this a very inconvenient time for solicitude about any thing.*"—Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*.

such provision *then*, for the first time, is like seeking provision for the body when the winter is come. Brethren, it is a frightful delusion. It is the very case of him who built his house upon the sand. Thoughtless folly and sin may please during fair weather and sunshine; but when the storm and the floods come and beat upon the house, it will fall. Equally vain and wretched is the state of that man. All his life long he has fed his mind with delusions: and now, at last, to sustain his fainting spirit, he flies to the weakest of all delusions. Thus for instance: the Gospel speaks of the free grace of God in bringing men into a state of salvation; into which state we are brought by baptism, when first admitted into the Christian covenant: but he, for an opiate to his soul, chuses to understand the free grace of God, as if, according to the purpose of Divine mercy, holiness and obedience were no needful qualifications for heaven, and as if the greatest wickedness could be no bar to eternal life. Whatever the Gospel says of peace to the penitent, that he applies to himself; fancies himself a true penitent, though, most probably, he is only frightened by the near sight of death; if health returned he, most likely, would return to all his former forgetfulness of God, and would again, as heretofore,

do evil earnestly with both hands. Again: he seeks comfort from the minister of God, and endeavours, by protestations of sorrow and contrition, to draw from his lips an assurance of God's pardon: but the minister of God can neither bind nor release otherwise than as God hath appointed him, and will bring a heavy judgment on his own soul, if he shall presume to speak peace where there is no peace.

Procrastination runs through the whole of our religious duty. Every sinner imagines that he shall, at some future time, be more inclined to do his duty than he is now. This notion throws the whole frame of man into a torpid state; it spreads through all the veins; we are beguiled by its influence; we thus forget that our placid feelings are the effect of poison, and that we are sinking into a lethargy, from which multitudes never wake. But there is one point of duty in which it is more particularly fatal. I pray you, give the more careful heed to it, because this single point is sufficient to account for almost all our other sins and sinful sorrows.

All of you, and all who frequent the assemblies of the Church, have been repeatedly and solemnly called to the Lord's table. Many of you have

come to hoary hairs in an obstinate disregard of the call: you never once partook of the holy mystery: you never had any hindrance to keep you from it. Yet I doubt not, most of you purpose to do this before you die; and thus it is that the hour of death comes without reformation of the evil. Then the holy communion is desired: then, I say, when the faint languour of a departing soul disables the man from a reasonable participation of it. Seldom, I believe never, does there occur an instance of this kind which may warrant a hope, that such a dying communicant has performed an acceptable service. For the grace of sacraments, powerful as it is, operates only in conjunction with proper dispositions, and acts of the human soul: and such dispositions and acts are, I fear, under such circumstances never to be found.

That I may better illustrate the nature of the case, I will advert to a similar one. In the earlier ages of the Gospel, many of its professors were such as had been converted to it in maturity of life; being thus distinguished from Christians of the present day, who, for the most part, are admitted into the Church by baptism in infancy. These persons formed, it would seem, a just estimate of the sacramental grace of baptism; they looked up-

on it as conveying, to the worthy receiver, a full remission of sins and a covenanted title to God's everlasting kingdom. But they were extremely fearful, lest the grace of baptism should be annulled, by any sins committed after its reception. Under this feeling, it was common with them to put off the reception of baptism, until the convert should attain what might be thought a suitable frame of mind and habit of life; and many thus postponed it till the point of death; some, no doubt, till they were, by the circumstances of their situation at the time of death, finally excluded from the possibility of its administration. Their motive, as it would appear, was this: they supposed that the grace of baptism and the title to heaven, must then be sure and effectual, when no sin could be committed after baptism, to annul the baptismal covenant.

Thus the case would stand, if put upon its most plausible footing. But it cannot be doubted that many who thus acted, would, as St. Basil * has represented the matter, reason thus within themselves: "Stay awhile, let me enjoy the world and the flesh, and the pleasures of sin till I can desire them no longer: let me thus spend the flower of my life; then will I turn from my evil way and

* Hom. xiii. Exhortatio ad Baptismum.

be baptized : let me first yield my members to iniquity and to lust; then afterwards I will yield them to righteousness and to God." " This," says the venerable father, " is the meaning of your delay : you may disguise the matter and suppress the truth, but facts will speak for themselves."

And can there be a doubt, that many who defer the period of their communicating are actuated by the same principle? that they say within themselves, " I will wait till the sinful inclination is gone by, and then go to the Lord's table?" That is, if men would speak out, " I will have both my sins here and heaven hereafter."

With them I would remonstrate as St. Basil does with the former; " Beware lest you suffer shipwreck before you get into port. Doth not God see what is going on? Doth he not know your thoughts? Think you, that he is such an one as yourself, that he should be propitious and aiding to your unholy purpose? Will you give the vigour of your life to sin and lewdness, and *then* only turn to God, when the power of lust has sunk under the decrepitude of age! This is not the denial of sin, but the impotence of nature. The man who acts thus, is no more fit for the reward of God than a dead man is fit for a crown. And who has

told you, that this time of life will ever come? Should you live to see it, what right have you to presume on the retention of your faculties, to fit you for a sacramental service? What right have you to presume that you will even have an opportunity of celebrating a sacrament in your last hours? Do you consider the awful danger of neglecting an ordinance, which is necessary to salvation? Fly from the terrors of hell: lay hold on the kingdom: offer no excuses: for no excuse can in this case be valid *."

This, indeed, beloved, is one of the wildest errors of an evil heart, and therefore the more incurable. I will not, however, spare my efforts to display its vanity.

The Gospel covenant is one of the plainest things, as well as of the most sublime, that ever was proposed to man's understanding. It is simply

* Far from aiming at exact translation, I have only endeavoured to give, with abbreviation, but not without a degree of licence forbidden to a translator, the general effect of St. Basil's energetic remonstrance. The discourse to which reference is here made, though professedly addressed to those who delayed their baptism, contains many powerful arguments and strong representations, which carry with them an obvious application to the two cases, of those, in general, who delay their repentance, and of those in particular, who delay receiving the holy communion.

this: repentance and remission of sins. He whose heart is changed from sin to holiness; whose heart is *so* changed, that he seriously purposes a corresponding and undelaying change of life: that man is qualified for the benefit of this covenant. The covenant itself is first made in baptism: it is renewed in the Lord's Supper. Otherwise than by this covenant there is no way proposed by God in which man can embrace the joys of heaven, or escape the pains of hell.

Consider, then, the purpose of this covenant: that it is to purify men to the denial of sin, and to the practice of good works, in order that they may be thus qualified for eternal life. And think you that God will endure such a mockery as this, that a man should then first renounce his sins, when he vainly imagines that he has no longer any sins to renounce?—that he should then first deny his lusts, when he fancies that he has no lusts to deny? Shall the covenant, the only covenant by which we escape death, shall this covenant be first slighted by our rejection, and then mocked by our observance? For so it is when we treat it as if it were given, not for a bond of holiness, but for a security to sin. Is it not the plain meaning of such conduct, “I will have the pleasure of my sins and the joy of heaven

do?" And is this our conduct to him who has given us a glorious redemption, and whose long-suffering now waits for our repentance? What greater indignity could you offer to God? Could any thing be more fitted to bring down upon you the doom of final impenitence? Alas! beloved, this, I fear, is always the case with those who will, till death stares them in the face, persist in suffering things to go to such a frightful extremity.

Had you not been baptized in your childhood, I doubt not that you would have delayed baptism as you now do the Lord's supper. I doubt not that you would have wished to defer it till after a full enjoyment of the world and the flesh. Consider, however, the true state of your case under its actual circumstances: wilful sin, committed after baptism, is as dangerous to the sinner as that which is committed after partaking of the Lord's table. Nevertheless, your parents did you no wrong in bringing you as a babe to baptism. Had you not been thus brought into God's covenant, you must have lain under his condemnation; if you violate that covenant, the same sentence of condemnation, till you are restored by repentance, lies upon you. So it is also with the Lord's Supper.

It may be said, that the sins of communicants are done in *despite* of grace. But it is to be re-

membered, that this is the case of all wilful sin committed after baptism; and, whether the sins of those who can reason thus deliberately, be wilful or not, I leave you to judge. You cannot, therefore, mend your condition as a sinner, by declining the holy communion: for the guilt of sinning in despite of grace, is the aggravating quality of all wilful sin after baptism. But you are to reflect, that the sins of those who refuse to communicate, have also their peculiar aggravation, and a horrible one it is; for they are done under a contemptuous *refusal of grace*. It is the will of God, it is his peremptory will, that we should thus renew our covenant with him: should you do this with a false heart and sinful purpose, far be it from me to extenuate the just measure of guilt and danger which attaches to your conduct. But I must, nevertheless, tell you, that this danger is not exchanged for a less, by forsaking the Lord's table; for this is to add to all our other sins one more; to add one more sin of deep malignity; it is to sin under a despite of baptismal grace, and under a stubborn refusal of further grace *. Consider then, how shall we

* "The danger of unworthy receiving being so very great, it seems the safest way wholly to refrain from this sacrament, and not to receive it at all. But this objection is evidently of no force; if there be (as most certainly there is) as great or greater danger on the other hand,

escape if we neglect so great salvation? There is no salvation propounded to us by God, except through his holy covenant; nor any method of solemnizing and ratifying that covenant, otherwise than by the sacraments of the church.

As to him who comes to the Lord's table in an unfit state, that man is not safe; as to him who comes not at all, that man is still less safe. What must we do then? Why let us come to the holy table, and bring with us a true penitent heart and lively

viz. in the neglect of this duty. And so, though the danger of unworthily receiving be avoided by *not* receiving, yet the danger of neglecting and contemning a plain institution of Christ, is not thereby avoided. Nay, of the two, it is the *greater* sign of contempt wholly to neglect the sacrament, than to partake of it without some due qualification." Tillotson's Sermons, vol. I. Sermon xxv. ed. 1720. "Whereas thou pleasest thyself, that thou art on the safest side, by keeping away from the ordinance: this is a manifest mistake, because the guilt and danger of unworthy refusing, is certainly as great, or greater, than the danger of unworthy receiving: for, not to come at all, is a bold affront to the *authority* of Christ, and a mighty contempt of the *love* of Christ. It is a casting off the profession of Christianity. It is a renouncing the communion of saints, and a quitting all claim and interest in the covenant of grace. Did they in the Gospel, who made light of Christ's invitation to the marriage supper, escape any better than he that came without a wedding garment? Were they not both destroyed; they for their disobedience, and he for his disrespect?" Burkitt's Help and Guide to Christian Families.

faith. Then shall we taste and see how gracious the Lord is. This is the only blessed and the only safe course.

You cannot now but understand my meaning, when I said, that this sin of not communicating, is sufficient to account for all the other sins of our lives. The sacraments of God are powerful ; but they have no power with those who set them at nought and do not receive them. If men feel not the obligation to receive them : it is impossible they should feel the obligation to holiness which they impose ; and it is quite unreasonable to expect that they should enjoy the sanctifying grace, which sacraments were designed to convey, and without which no man can mortify his sins and please God. The purpose of sacraments is quite nugatory, if men, by declining to receive them, may decline the obligations which belong to them.

This is a very vain imagination. I will now speak to another. You put off communicating till the inclination to sin is gone by. But pray, when is this time to come? If you live to extreme old age, why then, to be sure, the lusts of your *youth* will have passed by ; but does it therefore follow that the power of sin will be quite dead in you? Believe it not. It is in the case of old men, that the power

f sin most peculiarly exerts its pure unmixed enormity: it then assumes the character of a tyrant, adding mockery and insult to all the hardships of a cruel domination. Sin prompts the young to sensuality: but then they get pleasure, or at least they seek it; here is a motive: but it exerts over aged men a power which seems independent of all accountable motives. Avarice, jealousy, uncharitableness, and revenge: passions like these, hateful as they are to God, and inconsistent with his mercy, are often the torment of old age. Nor can they be thought more venial than the excesses of youth: for oftentimes there is no temptation to them, nor any object, even worldly and sinful, to account for their existence. What reasonable account, for instance, can be given of him who heapeth up riches, when he knows that he cannot enjoy them himself, and he knoweth not who shall gather them? Yet this inclination, it is well known, will oftentimes depart from old men only with their last breath. You see, then, the folly of presuming on a time of life, when the power of sin will be extinct: be assured that such a time will never come as long as you live in the body. The hope of such a time is delusion, and the probable issue that hope will be impenitence or despair.

Would you escape this dreadful state? Would you escape that unutterable state, of which the remorse and terrors of a death-bed are but a foretaste? Remember then your Creator now, while the evil days come not. Remember now, before it is too late, all that must be done to smooth the passage of the last hour. Remember to provide for your comfort that which comforted St. Paul in the prospect of death; that your rejoicing may be like his, the testimony of your conscience, that you have fought the good fight and kept the faith *. Remember the purpose for which your Redeemer died; that it was to purify to himself as the elect heirs of his kingdom, a people zealous of good works. Labour to fulfil this purpose as it regards yourself: in order that, in that hour when all worldly comfort shall fail you, you may have the consolation of knowing, that you did so labour. In this matter, more than in all others, delays are dangerous. Believe me, no man who puts off his repentance to his last sickness, can have any ground to hope that he shall leave this world with a just confidence of God's pardon. For that man can never be assured of his own sincerity; since the sincerity of our conversion can be proved only by the subsequent amendment of life, and there-

* 2 Tim. iv. 7.

fore he can have no full proof of his sincerity, unless a longer time were granted him. Nay, he could not have such proof unless he were to become young again. For the Gospel calls upon us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts : unless a man do this he cannot shew his devotion to God, nor look forward, with reasonable comfort, to the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ *. But how can that man mortify the lusts of the world, at least the fleshly lusts of it, when perhaps he has no such lusts remaining to mortify ; when he can scarcely taste his food ; and when the unholy fire, which it was his duty to subdue, has of itself gone out ? How can such a man satisfy himself, that if his youthful passions should return, his youthful excesses would not come along with them ? If he cannot thus satisfy himself, how can he think that God will be satisfied with his repenting of those sins which he has not power to repeat ?—Are you now unwilling to return to God, but intend it at a future day ? And can you think, that the same unwillingness will not *then* possess you ? Be not deceived ; you will then, in the natural course of things be more unwilling than you are now : for your

* Tit. ii. 11—14.

good purposes will be enfeebled by time, and by time also the power of sin will be more confirmed: you will have grown weaker and your enemy stronger.—Add to this the danger, lest God, who worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure; without whom we can neither do, nor even think, any thing that is good: lest he, I say, should, after the usual method of his dealing with presumptuous sinners, withdraw from us his grace and Holy Spirit, thus leaving us to that helpless state of nature, in which man has no power to do any thing but evil. Listen then now to the call of mercy, now, in the day of salvation and in an acceptable time. Let your loins be girded about and your lamps burning: for you know not how soon the bridegroom may come, and when the door is once shut, then mercy must give way to judgment, and every ray of comfort will be quenched in darkness. Then will be verified the warning of Divine Wisdom, as it is conveyed to us in the words of Solomon. “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction

cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them *." Beloved, take good heed to the things which have been said unto you: and may God grant, that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

* Prov. i. 24—32.

SERMON IV.

ON THE EXISTENCE, MALICE, AND ACTIVITY OF
EVIL SPIRITS; AND ON THE MEANS OF OUR
SAFETY FROM THEM.

MATT. viii. 31.

The devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.

“FOR this purpose,” says the word of truth, “the Son of God was manifested, *that he might destroy the works of the devil**.” In order, then, to a right estimate of the purpose intended and effected by our Lord’s coming into this world, it will be

* 1 John iii. 8.

highly useful that we should bear in mind *what are* the works of the devil; since it was in order to the destruction of these works that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

Now the works of the devil are, so far as we are concerned, principally these: namely, the guilt and wretchedness of mankind. The first guilty act of man,—the act by which sin first came into the world,—was the consequence of his temptation: hence arose the defilement and depravity of our nature: and the same temptation has, ever since the fatal hour of the first transgression, been actively employed in soliciting mankind to every evil work. Hence arise the doom of death and all the misery of life: for these are sent, by the righteous displeasure of our Maker, as the punishments of sin.

Look now, on the other hand, to our Redeemer's earthly ministration: you will find it to have been most exactly framed with a view, to counteract and conquer each of the evils which the devil had thus brought on us. For Christ encountered and overcame the temptation of the devil: he has taught us to do the same, and he dispenses to us an all-powerful succour, as the certain means of victory. His life was employed in doing good and relieving

misery : thus displaying his strong repugnance and opposition to all the evils which the devil, as the author of sin, had been the occasion of our suffering. With regard to death, (which is the chief bitterness of our portion, and the chief penalty of our guilt,) our Lord took part of our flesh and blood for this very cause, that he might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is the devil *. This character of our Lord will indeed be found to pervade, throughout, both the conduct of his life and the dispensation of his gospel ; and it is in strict agreement with this character that we find in the records of his ministry, the many instances in which evil spirits were, by the word of Christ, commanded to depart, and cast out, from the bodies of men whom they possessed and tormented.

Among the narratives of this class, that which occurs in the gospel for this day is distinguished by a very remarkable particular. The evil spirits, after they had been expelled from the bodies of men, were permitted to enter into those of swine. This circumstance has been viewed as carrying with it considerable difficulty, and has, I fear, too often been taken hold of as a subject of ridicule for

* Heb. ii. 14, 15.

a thoughtless mind and a scornful tongue. But if we will bestow upon it a careful consideration, we shall, if I mistake not, find good reason to regard the passage before us, as a highly edifying portion of divine truth, and as one subservient, in an eminent degree, to the advancement of piety and the growth of spiritual wisdom.

If there *be* a wicked being, who seeks, by subtle and imperceptible methods of attack, the destruction of man; is it not important that man should be aware of it? Who can stand on his guard against an adversary, whose existence is unknown to him? Why then should it be thought unworthy of the divine wisdom and mercy of the Son of God, that a sensible proof of this fact should be afforded to those, whom he came to rescue out of the power of their cruel enemy? When the evil spirits departed out of the men, they went into the swine, and quickly discovered, by the effects which followed, their real existence, their activity and malice. Here was a proof, and a sensible proof, given, of that which it was highly needful for us to know. It thus became manifest, that there really do exist such wicked beings; that the men relieved by this divine miracle had really been possessed and tormented with them: and all pretence was cut off for

saying, that the torments of these men had been the simple effect of melancholy or madness : for it is not the nature of melancholy and of madness, to pass in the manner thus described, from the bodies of men into those of brutes. If the devils had been suffered to pass at the same instant into the bodies of other men, we humbly conceive, that this would not so well have answered the purposes of divine goodness. For men are, in the eye of God, of more value than brutes ; we may well suppose it, then, more agreeable to the will of God, that the important truth, in which we are so deeply concerned, should be made known by the suffering of brute creatures than by that of rational beings. But it also deserves our consideration, that in this latter case, the proof that was wanted would not have been so clearly and convincingly made out. Had the same effects that shewed themselves in these brutes been discovered in men, occasion might have been taken by the infidel and the gainsayer, to allege the possibility of concert, contrivance, and deception : thus discrediting the reality of both the malady and the cure. It has also been thought that, on the latter supposition, such effects might have been suspected to arise from morbid melancholy, or from the extravagance of a vitiated

fancy, goading a man on to distraction and suicide. But it has been contended that this mode of explaining things would not be so consistent with the nature of brutes; for that the brutal nature does not admit the delusions of the imagination*. Whatever may be thought of this, you cannot but acknowledge, that the narrative affords to us the fullest proof of both the existence and the activity of evil spirits. I must add, that it illustrates also the works and ends which they pursue, and which are, nothing else than the torment, madness, and destruction of those who harbour them in their souls or give ear to their suggestions. Happy would it be for us, if, whenever we are tempted to sin by any baits of pleasure or vanities of the

* This view of the subject is that of Bishop Warburton. "The wild extravagance of human fancy," says he, "may be able to raise chimeras that shall affright the raiser of them to distraction. Yet brutes (we all know) have none of this dangerous faculty." This last sentence appears to me to contain a hasty assertion: for, in fact, I do not see how we can possibly understand what *is* the real nature of brutes as to this point. It is for this reason that I do not myself insist on this representation; for, though plausible, I cannot think it quite satisfactory. I have, however, given it, in deference to the authority of this great writer; whose general view of this narrative concurs with that which I am anxious to maintain. See the Divine Legation of Moses, B. IX. c. 5.

world, we would bethink ourselves of the frightful destruction which, for our edification and warning, occurred to these brute creatures, and would contemplate in that the genuine and natural effect of holding any parley with the tempter, and of suffering any impure spirit to make his way into our soul! For when we are thus tempted we have good reason to apprehend, that some wicked being is secretly at work with us; that he is urging us on to destruction; and that our compliance with his solicitations will be followed by an effect, such as is here figured out to us.

It ought to be added, that the proof of this point was particularly adapted to the generation among whom the Son of God appeared. For he came in order to destroy the works of the devil; and it is needful, in order to a right faith in Christ, that we should regard him in connexion with this purpose. But there was a numerous and powerful sect among the Jews, who disbelieved the existence of that very being whose works our Lord came to destroy. These were the Sadducees, who said, "that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit*." It was therefore as necessary to confute the scepticism

* Acts xxiii. 8.

of these men, as it was to silence the traditions of the Pharisees: both of these sects holding such peculiarities of incredulity, and of belief, as were equally contradictory to the faith which our Saviour came to establish by his miracles and his doctrine.

We know, indeed, that it has been thought to detract from the due honour of God's almighty power and of his goodness to mankind, when we believe, that he suffers such a being to exist, and to work mischief to the souls of men, after the manner that we have represented: and we know also, that there is a kind of philosophy current in the world, which disbelieves the existence and possible activity of such beings, because it insists upon explaining every thing by natural causes, and is unwilling to credit any thing which cannot be substantiated by demonstrative proofs and sensible evidence. But we are to remember, that all the universe of matter and spirit lies open to God, that he sees and knows all things, and understands all their tendencies. Grounded on this universal knowledge is the choice of those means, which he has adapted for our salvation and welfare. But as to us, what do we see? We see very little, and yet are wont to pronounce judgment as if we saw every thing. This presumption we ought to

restrain. We ought to rest assured, that those means of happiness which God has provided are the best and the most effective. If God suffer the devil to exist and to tempt us, this can do us no harm, if it be not our own fault; for the devil can never hurt us while we cleave stedfastly to God and to the grace of Christ. But this order of things may do us good, though we understand it not. That our way to heaven does not lie smooth before us, but is obstructed by the adversary; this, for aught we know, may minister to our fuller and more sure attainment of heavenly blessedness: and of this, though we do not now comprehend it, we may perhaps be convinced in our glorified state. For consider: temptations are among the worst of afflictions; yet it is the tendency of afflictions in general to work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. We are to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations; but this we should not be exhorted to do, unless temptations ministered to our welfare*. It is plain then, that, on this view, the author of temptation can do us no harm, if it be not our own fault. "Resist the devil," says St. James, "and he will flee from you†."

* 2 Cor. iv. 17. James i. 2.

† James iv. 7.

“ Fear not the devil,” says an apostolical father, “ for if thou fear the Lord, thou shalt have dominion over him; because there is no power in him*.”

Some there are who decry these views as proper subjects of ridicule, and fit only for credit with the understandings of women and children. Ridicule and levity cannot, however, prove a thing to be either true or false, but, when indulged on a serious subject, prove only the weak judgment and bad taste of him who indulges them. That there are, far beneath the power and glorious perfection of God, but superior in power and energy to man, a race of etherial and spiritual beings; that some of these beings are good, and minister to the happiness and innocence of man, but that others are wicked, and seek to circumvent and destroy him; and that such wicked beings are, by the subtilty and spirituality of their nature, able to insinuate themselves into the minds and thoughts of men: who shall say that all this is false? He who does, presumes to *say* that which he cannot possibly *know*, and to give his opinion on subjects which, from the condition of his nature, he cannot possibly understand. On

* Hermæ Pastor. Lib. ii. Mand. 7.

subjects of this kind, it is impossible for us to know any thing but what God may have been pleased to discover by his special revelation : and that revelation has, I apprehend, clearly taught us the contrary of all such speculations. Indeed, I think there can be little doubt, that the narrative before us was given for our instruction as to this very point, that we may learn from it the real existence of evil spirits, their activity, and their wicked designs against our peace.

Of persons possessed with evil spirits, we find many examples recorded in the Gospels. But we are not to suppose that such cases were never known before the time of our Lord's ministry. That they have, at any time since the publication of the Gospel, wholly ceased among mankind, is what I think it would be rash to affirm : nor do I think that a clear and satisfactory proof of such a point can be established. But I do not hesitate to say, that it would be highly rash and improper in us, who possess not the gift of discerning spirits, to put any decided construction on any particular cases which may occur to us. Let it be our great endeavour to see, that the enemy gain not any advantage over ourselves, and so to exercise our vigilance against him, as becomes those who are not ignorant of his devices.

Of such a being, few things can better promote the purpose than a persuasion, in the minds of men, that no such being exists. We are to resist the devil: we are to be sober and vigilant, because the devil is our adversary, and he, like a lion roaring with hunger, walketh about seeking whom he may devour *. But if there be no adversary to hurt us, where is the necessity of such resistance and watchfulness? Let me explain this matter by a similar case: In the war between Israel and Syria, we are told † that while Benhadad with his confederate kings, after expressing a boastful contempt for the enemy, was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, the enemy came suddenly upon them, and slew every one his man; and the Syrians fled; and Israel pursued them; and Benhadad the king of Syria escaped on an horse with the horsemen. And the king of Israel went out, and smote the horses and the chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter. Such was the effect of indulging security in the midst of danger, as if no enemy were at hand! Not unlike to this, if we change our regard from temporal things to spiritual, was the dangerous downfall of the apostle St. Peter, when

* 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

† 1 Kings xx.

he denied his master: for it was the fruit of slumber and security at an hour, when he had been commanded to watch and to pray, and after he had been solemnly cautioned against the malice and machinations of the evil one.

This must be truly a dangerous condition, when men are blind to that danger in which they are really placed. That we are, in fact, subject to the attacks of a spiritual adversary; is a truth that we can hardly doubt, if we believe the Scriptures to be true. Our Lord himself was attacked with his temptation, and hath, as the captain of our salvation, taught us by his example, how to acquit ourselves in the hour of trial. In regard to such trials, he has promised us no security against the attack, but the power of victory in the battle. Christians are called to fight against the devil, and to wrestle with spiritual wickedness. St. Paul was troubled and buffeted with the messenger of Satan, lest he might be exalted with pride by the abundance of those glorious revelations with which God had honoured him. He prayed the Lord thrice that this sore evil might depart from him: this prayer was not granted, but instead of it our Lord comforted him by declaring, that the strength of Christ is made perfect in weakness, and that his grace

was sufficient for him*. That which was sufficient for St. Paul will also be sufficient for us. Keep thyself in the way of God's commandments; then shall the grace of Christ be sufficient for thee, and the wicked one shall not touch thee. For it is certain, that while we maintain a vital union with Christ, none shall be able to pluck us out of his hand†. Such is the blessed advantage of maintaining, by faith and obedience, the communion of saints. Nor should we forget, on the other hand, the unspeakable danger of being cut off from this communion: then do men no longer continue the children of God, but become the children of the devil. Thus, I conceive, may we rightly understand that passage, where it is required by St. Paul, that the incestuous Corinthian should be delivered over to Satan: that is, he was to be shut out from the communion of saints, and the sacraments of the Church; in other words, he was excommunicated‡. Being thus shut out from the grace of Christ, the consequence would be, that he would fall under the power of the wicked one. So also in the case of Hymeneus and Alexander, of whom we read in the Epistle to Timothy. They also were, by the au-

* 2 Cor. xii.

† John x. 28.

‡ 1 Cor. v. 5.

thority of St. Paul, excommunicated, or delivered over to Satan *: and the reason of their excommunication seems, according to the Apostle's words, to have been this; that they had made shipwreck of their faith, by endeavouring to separate the faith of Christ from a good conscience †, that is, from a life obedient to God. In both these cases, the judgment, though awfully severe, was passed in order to the amendment, and not to the destruction, of the offenders. The incestuous person was punished for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus ‡: punished with a temporal suffering, in order to save him from eternal destruction. And this person, after his repentance, was to be forgiven and comforted, lest he should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow §. And the punishment of the others was inflicted, that they might learn not to blaspheme ||. In both cases it appears, that the grace of Christ was withdrawn from men, who had sinned in despite of that grace: and they were thus doomed to learn, by bitter experience, the miseries of being cut off from communion with Christ, and given up to the torment of their spiritual adversary, in order that they

* 1 Tim. i. 20.

† Ibid. 19.

‡ 1 Cor. v. 5.

§ 2 Cor. ii. 7, 8.

|| 1 Tim. i. 20.

night know the blessedness of that state from which they had fallen, and, when again admitted into it, might be the more careful to avoid those evil works which break off the union between Christ and the soul.

We noticed, in one of these instances, the attempt to separate the faith of a Christian from a good conscience. This, beloved, is one of the surest ways to throw ourselves into the snare of the devil. It is sin, it is the putting away of a good conscience; which breaks the holy band of union with Christ. When that union is dissolved, we are shut out from the grace of Christ, and laid open to all the attacks of the adversary. The same may be said respecting the neglect of the means of grace: for by these means of grace the mystical union between Christ and the believer's soul is maintained and kept up. You see, then, the unspeakable danger of neglecting those essential means of communion with our Saviour, who is the spring of our spiritual life and the shield of our safety: I mean, prayer and the Lord's Supper. From the narrative we have been considering, you may see figured out, in the destruction of brute creatures, the malice and mischief to which every man is exposed, who, having estranged himself from the fountain of

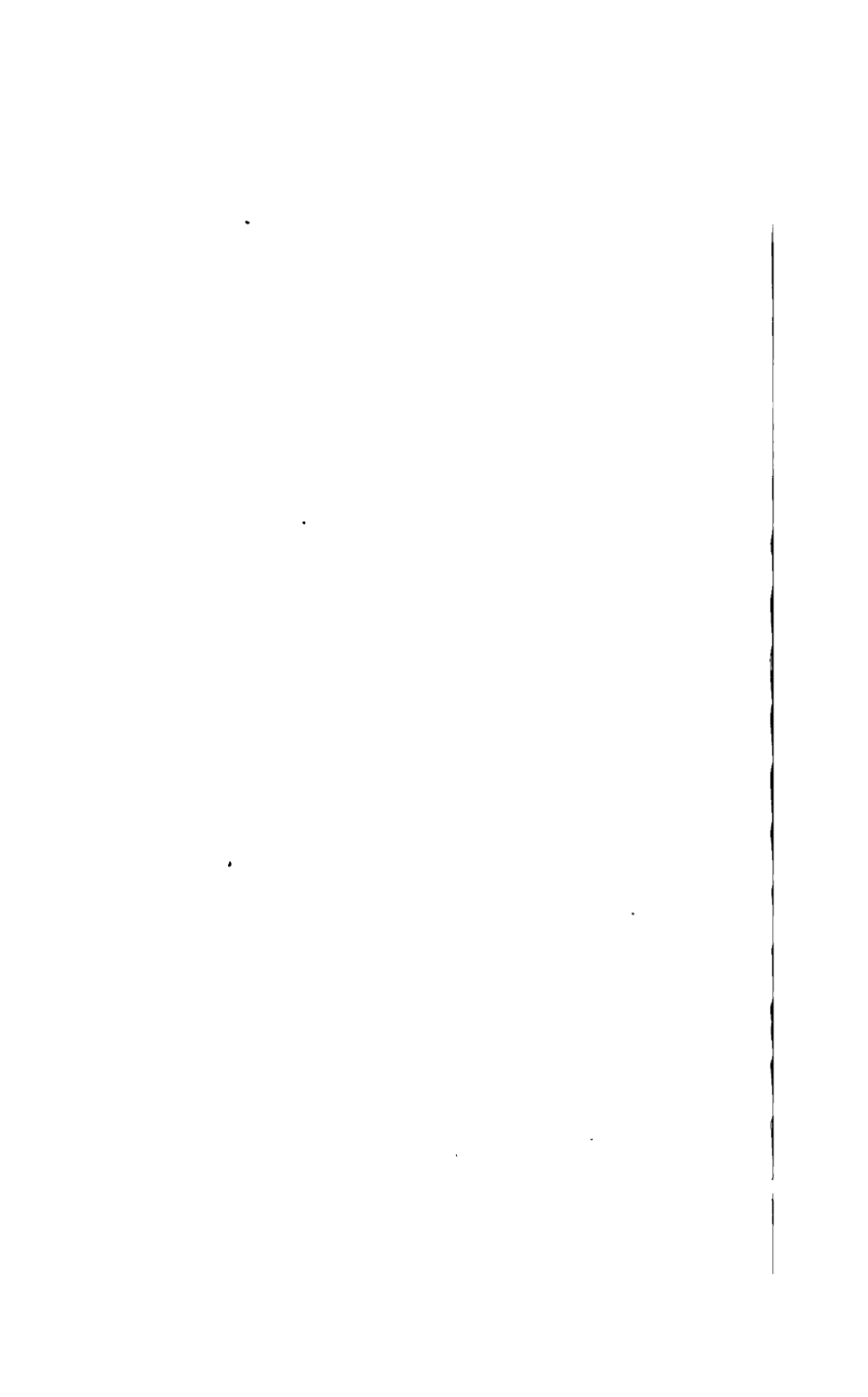
grace, from the benefits of Christ's blood, and the protection of his mighty arm, is thus laid open to the powers of hell. Let a sense of these things deeply influence our minds, and shew us the unspeakable danger of breaking, by any act or habit of wilful sin, or by the neglect of Sacramental ordinances, our communion with Christ. Let it teach us, that every temptation to sin is a lie, and that the purpose of it is, the destruction of our bodies and our souls; and let it teach us to fear, whenever we harbour unclean or wicked thoughts, or pursue any wicked desire, lest we be putting ourselves in the power of him who, though he may be transformed into an angel of light, and though he may beguile us with bright and pleasing fancies of advantage and of pleasure, can then only be properly regarded, when he is seen in that character in which he now acts, and which he had from the beginning, as a liar and a murderer.

In conclusion, I will call your attention to the methods of safety which, with reference to the danger which has now been displayed to you, have been prescribed by St. Paul. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against

vers, against the rulers of the darkness of this
rld, against spiritual wickedness in high places.
herefore take unto you the whole armour of God,
at ye may be able to withstand in the evil day,
d having done all, to stand. Stand therefore,
aving your loins girt about with truth, and having
a the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet
od with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
bove all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye
nall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the
icked. And take the helmet of Salvation, and the
word of the Spirit, which is the word of God:
raying always with all prayer and supplication in
he spirit, and watching thereunto with all perse-
verance and supplication *."

May the powerful arm of God shield us from all
attacks of the evil one, and preserve us blameless
till the coming of our Lord Jesus!

* Ephes. vi. 11—18.



APPENDIX.

NOTE ON SERMON II.

As the words, *that he might go to his own place*, may seem to countenance the notion of a personal and absolute reprobation; it may not be improper to offer respecting them, a few remarks, of which the introduction into the body of the foregoing discourse would have been unsuitable to its practical design.

The Greek, *πορευθηναι εις τον τοπον τον ιδιον*, presents an elliptical form of speech, capable of being supplied in two ways, both of which are equally agreeable to the idiom of the language.

First, we may suppose the particle *ωστε* to be prefixed to the above-cited words. In this case, the meaning will be, *that Judas had so fallen as to go to his own place*. It cannot justly be said, that this would present an allusion remote from the purpose, on which the apostles and disciples were now convened: for it conveys an affecting warning of the dreadful penalty of unfaithfulness in the pas-

APPENDIX.

idioms of different languages, would seem to be the import of the words.

A third example may be adduced from the Odyssey of Homer *, in which Ulysses thus addresses Alcinous :

Σοι δ' εμα κηδεα θυμος επετραπετο στονοεντα
Ειρεσθ', ΟΦΡ' ετι μαλλον οδυρομενος στοναχιζω.

Here the literal rendering of the words would be to this effect: " You ask me to relate my sorrows *in order that* I may augment my grief;" but the real sense obviously arising from the circumstances of the case, is, " Your desire that I should relate my sorrows will have *the effect* of augmenting my grief."

Dr. Whitby has, I find, adduced from the Old Testament the two following exemplifications of the same point: " Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, *that they may be cut off* †." " The statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels, *that I should make thee a desolation* ‡."

Should these remarks occur to the eye of a

* Lib. ix. ver. 12.

† Hosea viii. 4.

‡ Micah vi. 16.

learned reader, they may possibly be thought to involve an unprofitable waste of time, in proving a point familiar to him. But learned persons are not the only individuals whose case is to be consulted in the elucidation of Scripture; and it is certainly important to obviate, with regard to *every* class of Christians, that ignorance of scriptural phraseology, which has been, on many occasions, the only basis of a pestilent error, or of a blasphemous cavil. I feel myself therefore justified in proceeding to another citation from the sacred text, and to a few additional remarks.

“Think not,” says our Lord, “that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword*.” This passage is, with respect to grammatical construction, exactly similar to that which has been the subject of the foregoing observations. The phrase is elliptical; the ellipsis is capable of being supplied in both of the two ways which have been already suggested; and, whichever of these two ways be preferred, the meaning may justly be regarded as coming to the same point. Whatever ideas of peace the apostles may have connected in their minds with the advent of their

* Matt. x. 34.

Lord, they were not to expect that peace would be the immediate *effect* of his coming; for it would furnish the occasion of horrid wars and persecutions.

A late writer, however, of a work which *he designates* as a history, has, with manifest reference to this passage, expressed himself thus: "The bloody precepts so repeatedly inculcated in the Koran, are ascribed by the author*, to the Pentateuch and the Gospel. But the mild tenour of the evangelic style may explain an *ambiguous* text, that Jesus did not bring peace on earth, but a sword†."

Whether the above passage, as it affects the cause of revelation, be written in the spirit of candour; may easily be determined on a view of the remarks which immediately follow it. These, being remote from the purpose in hand, must be dismissed from present consideration. Mr. Gibbon's writings are characterised by the frequent indulgence of irony, on occasions when it is not easy to recognise the society of wit or genius. The present may supply an example: notwithstanding his concession, respectful as it may seem, it still appears, from *his* represen-

* That is, *by the author of the Koran.*

† Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Chap. 50, vol. ix. p. 295. Ed. 1806.

tation, that the text is *ambiguous*, and we can get from his acknowledgement nothing more than an admission, that it *may* be explained. But something may surely be said for the purpose of obviating the impression which such language is adapted to make. I will therefore observe, that if such impression was designed, those words express a wilful prevarication; but that if, on the other hand, Mr. Gibbon was affected by such an ignorance of Greek phraseology, as really to think that there *was* an ambiguity in this text, he was wretchedly ill qualified for his office as an historian of the Roman Empire.

There are some minor points relating to the history of Judas Iscariot, on which a few words of remark may be not unsuitable. St. Matthew relates that he hanged himself; and St. Peter, in the narrative of St. Luke, says, that falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. Both these particulars being quite consistent and possible, I have spoken of as undoubtedly true. Dr. Whitby mentions copies in which there is read ἀποκρεμαμενος, *while he was hanging*, or *hanging himself*, instead of πρηνης γενομενος, *falling headlong*: if this various reading

were approved, it would make any further remark unnecessary; but I have not at present the means of information necessary for an estimate of its value.

The field, afterwards called Aceldama, is said by St. Peter to have been purchased by Judas *. St. Matthew represents it to have been purchased by the chief priests†. The facts of the case were probably thus: Judas made the bargain, and the chief priests completed it; which they may be supposed to have done for the purpose specified, as a ready opportunity, afforded them by a purchase already contracted for, of solving the difficulty they were in respecting the lawful application of the money thrown back upon their hands.

The thirty pieces of silver for which Judas betrayed our Saviour, have been estimated in sterling value at rather more than three pounds eight shillings. It has been contended, that such a sum would be too small to stimulate the covetous appetite of Judas, now intent on the expectation of great affluence under the Messiah's kingdom. But it displays no great knowledge of human nature to suppose, that an avaricious man is insensible to the temptation of small gains. Indeed, when we con-

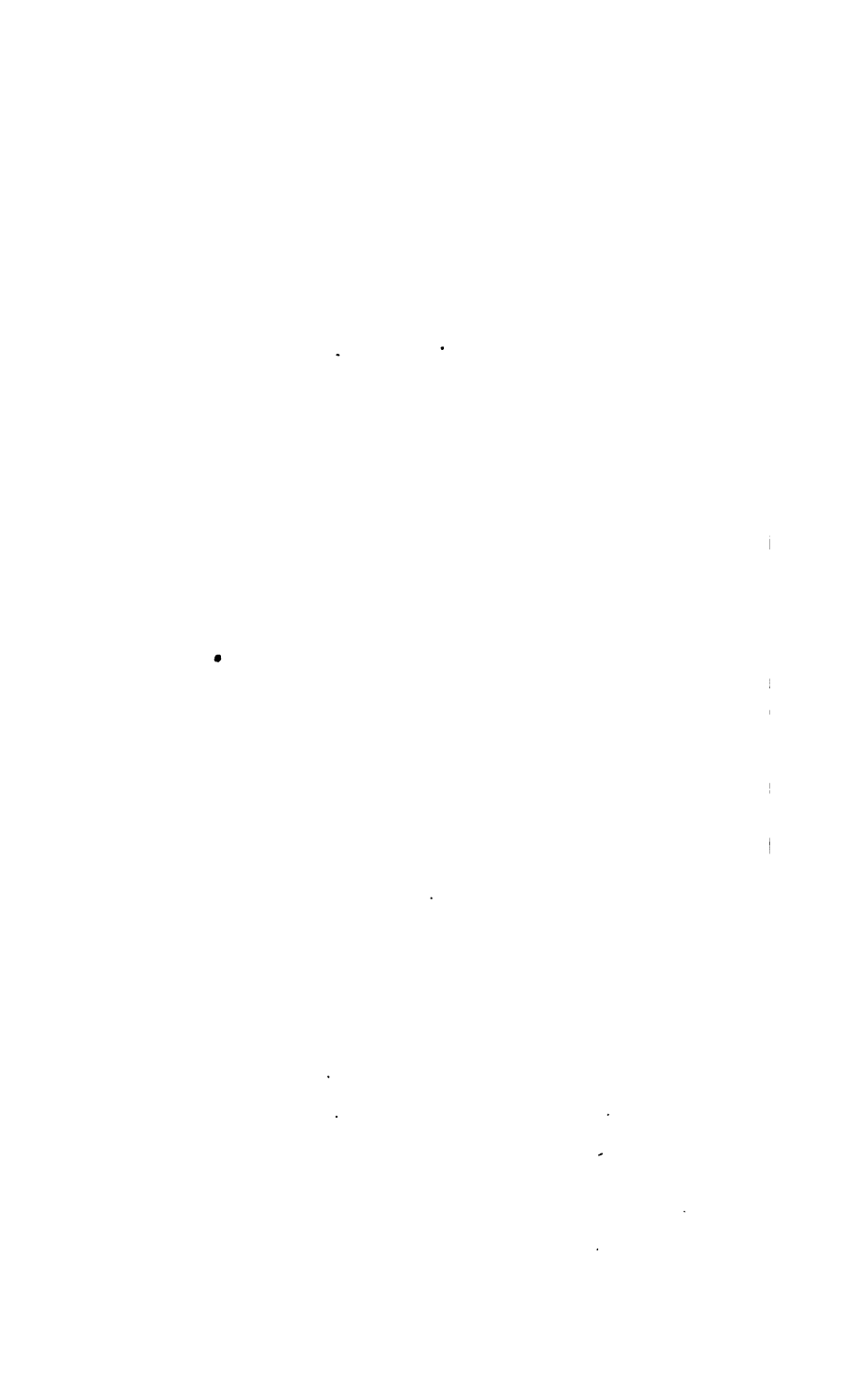
* Acts i. 18.

† Matt. xxvii. 8, 7.

sider the extreme poverty of our Lord and his apostles; and when we reflect that out of their penurious stock Judas was in the habit of pilfering; we must admit, that this would not appear a very small sum to *him*. But after all, a great difficulty, may be said, is this: How can it be consistent in Judas, while intent upon affluence in the Messiah's temporal kingdom, to compromise his great prospects for so mean a sum? To which I answer:—To demand an explanation of this is to ask more than nature will afford; it is to demand consistency where it is not, in the conduct and principles of a bad man. There is consistency in rectitude, in wisdom, and in truth: but there is none whatever in wickedness, folly, and falsehood.

THE END.

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